

**To: Leadership Board**

**On: 16 September 2020**

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**Report by: Chief Executive**

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**Heading: Renfrewshire Leisure Update**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides an update to the Leadership Board with a summary of the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on Renfrewshire Leisure since March 2020. It outlines the operational and financial disruption experienced and provides information on how the organisation has adapted to these changed circumstances. The report also outlines the key priorities and areas of risk for the remainder of the financial year.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Leadership Board notes the content of this report.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 In March 2020, working closely with the Council and following all government guidelines, Renfrewshire Leisure moved quickly to respond to the emerging coronavirus pandemic, protecting and supporting employees and communities, closing all in-person delivery of services and facilities.
- 3.2 The pandemic caused immediate disruption to Renfrewshire Leisure's business model, impacting on finances through the loss of ability to generate earned income and on operating practices. The pandemic also meant that Renfrewshire Leisure's Business Plan for 2020/21 which was approved by the Renfrewshire Leisure Board in March 2020, was not able to be formally submitted to the Leadership Board for formal sign off, due to the suspension of policy board meetings.

- 3.3 Due to the lockdown arrangements that have been in place, Renfrewshire Leisure has not been able to deliver against all the performance indicators set out in the service level agreement with the Council; however, Services have worked hard to innovate and provide the community with alternative access to health, sports, leisure and cultural activities, mainly through digital provision. From late May 2020, with the Scottish Government starting its route map easing of restrictions, Renfrewshire Leisure has been able to start the process of gradually re-opening some services and facilities. It is anticipated that the majority of services will have returned through the autumn period.
- 3.4 Renfrewshire Leisure has provided complementary activities and services (physical, cognitive and emotional) in addition to the mainstay of social, housing and food services provided by wider Council services. Renfrewshire Leisure's services support wellbeing by maintaining an ongoing sense of belonging and connection between people and their locale, a vital touchpoint for everyone during a time of social distancing and isolation.
- 3.5 In the course of its usual business, Renfrewshire Leisure provides numerous services that, by their nature, support the health and wellbeing of local people across communities. During the current pandemic, when operational buildings closed to the public, Renfrewshire Leisure teams moved swiftly to maintain core health services; expand services that engage with community groups; and provide alternative platforms to access cultural, sport and leisure opportunities. Highlights from 1st April to 30th June include:
- Re-opening of Barshaw Golf Course, Lochfield Bowling Green and Robertson Park Bowling Green on 29 May 2020;
  - Services providing continuous online content via the Ren TV channel with 15021 views during this period;
  - A new creative arts project – Tiny Revolutions Renfrewshire – launched to encourage people to engage in creative activities within their communities;
  - Libraries provided free CoderDojo@Home sessions with Paisley YMCA, a coding club for 18-17 year olds;
  - Libraries recorded 13,319 e-books loaned during this period, an increase of 3,107 over the same time last year;
  - Sports Services launched the RL Online Olympics, where there were 4,945 entries from 50 schools over 7 weeks of online sports challenges;
  - A walking challenge was organised for members of the public to walk the equivalent of the boundary of Renfrewshire (48 miles) across the month of June. A total of 616 walkers took part with a combined distance walked of 33,698 miles.

#### **4. Service Update**

This section of the report provides an update on how different services provided by Renfrewshire Leisure have been adapted to provide continued and new service provision for Renfrewshire residents following the emergence of the pandemic.

##### **Sports Services**

4.1 One of the first activities within Renfrewshire Leisure's contingency planning prior to lockdown was to prepare for transferring a number of key activity classes online – particularly those that support people with long term health conditions – to minimise service disruption.

##### **4.2 Health & Wellbeing**

The Macmillan, Live Active and Vitality programmes were merged to enable the widest reach possible, ensuring the same provision is there for all existing users. Contact was maintained with every client working with these services prior to Covid-19 alongside new GP and other referrals being received and included. Approximately 14 classes per week are being offered with over 2,300 attendances to date since lockdown began. Classes are suitable for all abilities, offering both standing and seated options.

4.3 Home-based exercise packs have been provided for those who cannot access the online class programme or prefer not to. To date, 81 packs have been posted out to users in the community. Support, advice and information has continued to be offered around physical activity and nutrition for all those with long term conditions, with 509 phone-based consultations hosted to date. Weekly contact has been maintained with all users in groups to ensure nobody is left behind due to social isolation.

4.4 Prior to Covid-19, Renfrewshire Leisure was working with Invest in Renfrewshire to establish a volunteering coaching programme to support people in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. Whilst this has been disrupted in its planned form, work is underway with the Health and Social Care Partnership about adapting health and wellbeing classes to provide support for people in recovery in an alternative format.

##### **Sport Services for Children and Young People**

4.5 Active Schools provides a wide variety of sporting opportunities for all pupils across Renfrewshire. To mitigate current lockdown restrictions, the Renfrewshire Active Schools team created digital sports sessions and were the fastest in Scotland to do so. These sessions cover several sports such as dance, football, basketball and athletics.

4.6 To date, there have been a total of 4,945 sign ups via the Class4kids online booking system, which allows the service to continue to track participation. This is something that has been paused in other authorities. The sign ups have shown that the content has been widely received across Renfrewshire and has also seen several participants from other local authorities take part.

- 4.7 Renfrewshire Active Schools shared this content nationally so that it is also available to families beyond the Class4kids sign up. Shetland Active Schools used the digital content to help support delivery within their school hubs, without which they would have no content to support their young people. The organisation also linked with national governing sports bodies and local community sport clubs to enhance the amount and range of available content.
- 4.8 Trying to alleviate the stress and anxiety that young people feel, the Renfrewshire Active Schools team created the trend for several online challenges via social media intended to lift the spirits by adding another element of fun. Sport Services also created the first Active Schools online competition. 45/49 primary schools within Renfrewshire signed up for the RL Online Olympics. Renfrewshire was the first local authority to offer online competition.
- 4.9 Sporting Memories Dementia Group  
This group normally meets every Thursday at KGV pavilion and has been maintained through direct weekly contact with each client, welcomed due to their social isolation. Quizzes are sent to keep their minds active and relieve boredom. Online Sporting Memories posts are a result of this contact. The social media campaign highlights each member and their favourite sporting memory. Renfrewshire Leisure are also actively maintaining contact with the Sporting Memory Foundation to keep this partnership alive.

#### **Paisley Museum Reimagined**

- 4.10 Renfrewshire Leisure is working directly with communities to develop the new Paisley Museum, and it is recognised there is a need to acknowledge the potentially changing priorities of audiences as result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The activity plan for the museum (this is a NLHF requirement, which sets out how the organisation will engage with audiences and the types of activities to be undertaken) has increased focus on health & wellbeing, inclusion, co-production and learning. This approach is based on collaboration, kindness and responsiveness.
- 4.11 Two key strands of project work have emerged from this adapted approach: Listening (building community, connections, relationships) and Creating (promoting sense of worth, identity, empowerment).
- 4.12 To date, 30 virtual co-production sessions have been held with community partners Kairos and Who Cares Scotland? and five listening sessions have taken place with other organisations with more programmed to come extending contact to dozens more.
- 4.13 In the longer term, the service will be reviewing the Museum's Introductory Gallery content in light of people's experience and changing priorities. The intention is to commission a writer to co-produce the narrative for the Introductory Gallery and to work with local organisations and individuals to develop it. Museum practice also offers the opportunity to develop a Covid-19 archive (which may be linked to the Introductory Gallery but also presents an

opportunity to collect digital and physical objects for display) and which would evolve from some of the earlier 'listening' discussions enabling Renfrewshire Leisure to collect a Paisley / Renfrewshire specific response to the pandemic experience.

### **Cultural Services**

4.14 Many services moved swiftly online, including:

- Library bookbug youtube sessions.
- Libraries ebook and magazine loans – 81% increase in users, 74% increase in loans.
- At home music sessions “Stuck in the house with you” a weekly livestreamed session from a different artist, Friday nights 8pm as a regular event.
- Inspired schools art competition: images of works being shared online; virtual exhibition tour being developed
- Targeted work and resources being sent to key primary schools (Heriot PS, Bridge of Weir, Gallowhill) tailored to specific learning from home requirements.
- Continuity of community engagement work, for example Art Boss programme for care experienced young people has moved to an online/digital programme working in partnership with Youth Services and Who Cares Scotland. This programme has been maintained through a Facebook group for 3-4 weeks, supported by artists delivering online workshops.
- Services are continuing to provide online content on the Ren TV channel which has had 15,021 page views during this period. ‘Stuck in the House’ began in April on Ren TV, a weekly programme featuring leading Scottish musicians performing from their homes on a Thursday evening.
- Story Time began on Ren TV with a range of professional childrens’ storytellers and theatre makers delivering high quality engagements for children and families.
- The Arts Team helped produce and broadcast a range of short films on Ren TV including ‘When Renfrew Roared’ and the ‘Renfrew Rhymer’.

4.15 A new service was also developed as a direct response to lockdown – Libraries Direct. Renfrewshire Council’s initial response to the Covid-19 crisis had taken the shape of the Neighbourhood Hubs and emergency food and medicine supplies to the vulnerable. Staff in the Hubs were increasingly aware of other needs being expressed by clients. These needs were varied, but it was felt that there were three areas where Renfrewshire Libraries could provide support.

4.16 Some clients have been identified as being particularly isolated and the idea of making “friendship” calls to this group was proposed. These calls will not be about food or medicine practicalities but more about contact, chatting, friendship, wellbeing. Library staff were identified as have having the right skill set around communication and empathy required.

- 4.17 In the current situation where there is more reliance on the digital world, staff in the Hubs also reported a need for digital skills support for clients, and again, library staff and library volunteers were identified as having the appropriate skill set. The limitations of providing digital skills support remotely are acknowledged.
- 4.18 Thirdly, a desire to deliver more than food and medicine to clients was formed. Wellbeing depends on more than just these essentials. For individuals and families isolated in their homes the delivery of books and toys is seen as a way to bring culture, education, fun and entertainment directly to these homes. It was felt to be important that people are able to make choices about which books and toys they want – rather than a “one size fits all” blanket approach. This was seen as important, as it gave people choice at a time where they had very limited choices over anything else. Renfrewshire Libraries made system alterations and developed a methodology to make this happen. The service has enabled partners to identify and attend to more complex needs for residents.

### **Asset Management**

- 4.19 The team have been undertaking business critical building checks throughout facility closures, ensuring site security, health and safety checks and plant maintenance. As Scottish Government guidance is updated through the lockdown easing route map, the Asset and Health & Safety teams have been working with service areas to ensure that all risk assessments, standard operating procedures and revised to ensure Covid-secure compliance in partnership with Council colleagues. Staff training in Covid-secure practices and their adapted workspaces has been taking place throughout the summer with input from Trade Unions.

### **Key Workers and Essential Services Support**

- 4.20 RL Sport Services staff supported the delivery of education hubs for children of front-line services (key workers). Staff worked full time across 5 venues to support teachers from March through to August providing c.1200 hours.
- 4.21 Indoor Leisure also provided staff deployed as drivers (29 staff) and food packers (28 staff) providing a further 1408 hours of support between 6<sup>th</sup> April and 1<sup>st</sup> May when Renfrewshire Leisure was able to further mitigate financial losses by registering some staff groups with the HMRC Job Retention Scheme.
- 4.23 Renfrewshire Leisure also supplied cleaning products, PPE and a defibrillator to health care partners at the start of the pandemic.

## **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The closure of facilities and services on 18th March has created a significant loss of income in 2020/21 for Renfrewshire Leisure. Whilst the majority of the organisation’s income is provided through a service

payment from Renfrewshire Council, a significant proportion of its annual income comes directly from customers using services which had to close due to the pandemic. The majority of this income comes from membership fees currently suspended, the learn to swim programme and venue and facility hire.

- 5.2 Renfrewshire Leisure has been actively managing and mitigating the resultant loss of income through spend controls; use of the HMRC Job Retention Scheme; recruitment freeze and through grant funding.
- 5.3 At present Renfrewshire Leisure remain heavily impacted by the lockdown response to the COVID crisis with facilities only recently approved for re-opening under the Scottish Government's phase three arrangements. It is anticipated that over the course of the remainder of 2020/21, Renfrewshire Leisure will experience only a partial financial recovery due to the ongoing operational restrictions impacting on the revenue recovery as well as additional operational costs to meet national guidelines.
- 5.4 It is forecast that over the course of 2020/21 the Council will be required to provide Renfrewshire Leisure with an additional £4.5m of financial support and this has been reflected in the Council's overall budget monitoring arrangements reported to the board.
- 5.5 As highlighted in the report, due to the pandemic Renfrewshire Leisure's Business Plan for 2020/21, which was approved by the Renfrewshire Leisure Board in March 2020, was not able to be formally submitted to the Leadership Board for formal sign off, due to the suspension of policy board meetings. Due to the significant financial challenges facing the organisation, the Renfrewshire Leisure Board is in the process of reviewing its 19/20 business plan. An update on this process will be provided to the Leadership Board in December 2020.

## **6. Corporate Governance – Board Arrangements**

- 6.1 Following the resignation of two independent directors earlier this year, the number of directors appointed to Renfrewshire Leisure's board fell below the minimum number defined in Renfrewshire Leisure's Articles of Association. Amendments to the Articles of Association were approved by Renfrewshire Leisure's Board in June 2020, and by the Chief Executive through the authority delegated during the pandemic, which enabled Renfrewshire Leisure's board to operate legally whilst a recruitment process was conducted to appoint new company directors.
- 6.2 The amendments to the Articles reduced the minimum number of directors to be appointed to Renfrewshire Leisure board from nine to eight. The appointment of directors does inevitably take some time to ensure that

directors with the necessary skills and experience are appointed to the board. The revised Articles of Association introduced a requirement for directors resigning from the board to give a notice period of three months to enable a recruitment process to be undertaken whilst directors are in their notice period.

- 6.3 The requirement for independent directors to be from the Renfrewshire area has also previously proven challenging and limits potential candidates with significant experience in the sector from being appointed to the board. A further change in the articles extends the opportunity for independent directors with valuable experience in the sector and with a 'connection to the Renfrewshire area' to be appointed to the board.
- 6.4 A recruitment process was carried out over the summer to appoint three new independent company directors. Renfrewshire Leisure operates with a maximum of eleven directors; three are appointed directly by the Council, six are independent directors from the business, sport and cultural community and two are employee directors. Council directors serve for the term of the administration of Renfrewshire Council (unless they resign or are removed as a director by Renfrewshire Council during their term). Independent directors are appointed for a period of five years unless they resign during this period.
- 6.5 Independent directors are appointed by Renfrewshire Council, guided by a nominations committee established by Renfrewshire Leisure. In line with the requirements set out in the Articles of Association, a Nominations Committee was established to consider potential candidates with the relevant skills and experience to recommend to the Council for appointment as Independent directors to the board.
- 6.6 Following consideration of applicants by the Nomination Committee, the Council's Chief Executive, with the authority delegated throughout the duration of the emergency, appointed the following independent directors to the Board of Renfrewshire Leisure:
- Valerie Ross, Independent Director, Communications, Fundraising, Equalities and Culture;
  - Mary-Frances Felletti, Independent Director, HR;
  - George Clark, Independent Director, Risk Management.

## 7. Key priorities and risks

- 7.1 Over the course of the next 2-3 months, Renfrewshire Leisure have identified the following as key risks and priorities:
- **Supporting the recovery of services and facility reopening** - to restart in-person services at facilities when updated guidance and physical capacity of buildings allow this to be done safely.

- **Delivery against cultural infrastructure projects** – working in collaboration with Council services to ensure project timelines can continue with the minimum disruption.
- **Contingency planning** – in partnership with the Council, Renfrewshire Leisure is currently planning for a number of secondary lockdown scenarios and local case management to provide public and staff reassurance where required.
- **Financial recovery** – ensure that Renfrewshire Leisure maximise funding routes through grants and where eligible through the Job Retention Scheme; ensure staff and customers are confident in a safe return to services, retaining existing members and actively working to attract new members; reactivate the Learn to Swim programme.
- **Scenario planning for 2021-22** – work in collaboration with Council colleagues and the RL Board to consider longer term recovery scenarios for 2021-22.
- **Community health & wellbeing** – continue to build health and wellbeing services through referral options, collocating with neighbourhood hubs, supporting people’s health through adapted services particularly where they have previously been shielding and are vulnerable.

7.2 In terms of risk, the Board should note that the risks relating to Renfrewshire Leisure’s recovery work and immediate concerns for the remainder of the financial year are:

- ensuring safety of staff and service users within social distancing guidelines and service-specific guidelines;
- balancing the need to operate ‘normally’ with a need to have robust and detailed contingency arrangements, regularly updated in line with current guidance, in place in the event of a second phase and restrictions being re-imposed; and
- supporting all service users and staff in relation to their emotional wellbeing and the potential impact of the pandemic on that wellbeing;
- maintaining the charity’s financial health as a going concern.

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## Implications of the Report

**1. Financial** – Any financial impact from COVID-19 referenced in this report will be progressed through the Council’s financial & budget planning process.

**2. HR & Organisational Development** – Any staffing changes from COVID-19 referenced in this report will be progressed through the RL’s HR policies, including home working and flexible working.

**3. Community/Council Planning** – the report details a range of activities which reflect local community and council planning themes.

**4. Legal** – None

**5. Property/Assets** - as facilities start to open in line with the Scottish Government route map, adjustment may have to be made to physical spaces to allow for physical distancing and to comply with relevant guidance.

**6. Information Technology** - None

**7. Equality & 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.

**8. Health & Safety** – Advice and guidance is being given to protect the health and safety of employees and service users in line with government and health guidance

**9. Procurement** – The ongoing pandemic has and will continue to have a significant impact on existing contractual obligations and on the procurement of future goods and services required by Renfrewshire Leisure.

**10. Risk** – As noted in section 6. We will continue to review in light of the coronavirus pandemic and report to future Leadership Board.

**11. Privacy Impact** – None

**12. COSLA Policy Position** – None

**13. Climate Change** – None.

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**List of Background Papers** - none

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