
To: Council

On: 17 December 2020

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Update on COVID-19

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an update of the current position in relation to the Council response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the last update report to Council on 25 June 2020, service updates have been provided to relevant Policy Boards on all the operational and service issues that have been impacted as a result of responding to the ongoing pandemic. Cross party briefings have also been issued to elected members fortnightly covering ongoing matters in relation to the COVID-19 response, key statistics relating to the transmission of the virus, updates to policy and guidance, impact on service provision and the operational position of services. A further report on the specific impact of the pandemic on the communities of Renfrewshire was considered at Council on 24 September 2020 and highlighted plans to support the economic and social recovery of communities as the pandemic moves forward and ultimately is mitigated through improved and newly developed approaches to testing and vaccination.
- 1.2 Section 3 provides a contextual update and includes the numbers of cases and deaths within Renfrewshire and notes the position in relation to Care Homes which has contributed significantly to the overall number of cases identified in Renfrewshire. This report focuses on the second wave of the virus, which has impacted particularly significantly on Renfrewshire where at times some of the highest levels of infection per 100,000 population in Scotland have been recorded and some of the highest overall positivity rates in Scotland.
- 1.3 Section 4 provides an overview of the current steps being taken to respond to and manage as far as possible the impact of the virus during the second and any subsequent waves of the virus.

- 1.4 Section 5 provides information on key steps being taken to mitigate and combat the effects of the virus. It highlights the expansion of COVID-19 testing and includes the development and running of a pilot community asymptomatic testing centre by Renfrewshire Council and partners on behalf of the Scottish and UK Governments and the recent approval of the first vaccine and the emerging programme to begin to deliver vaccinations nationally and locally is noted.
- 1.5 Section 6 outlines some of the key support measures that have been provided for businesses and communities, support for individuals and families being asked to self-isolate and the extension of furlough and business grants.

Key Messages

- 1.6 Renfrewshire has been particularly impacted during the second wave of the virus and while the number of confirmed positive cases in Renfrewshire per 100,000 population is now lower than at any time since October 2020, currently Renfrewshire still has one of the highest number of COVID-19 confirmed cases per 100,000 population in Scotland, as well as one of the highest positivity ratings in the country.
- 1.7 In Renfrewshire, a total of 293 people have sadly now died with COVID-19 since the outbreak of the virus. 87 of these deaths have taken place during the second wave of the virus – since September 2020. 33 of the deaths during the second wave took place in Care Homes; 49 in Hospital and 5 at home or other settings.
- 1.8 In recent weeks the proportion of positive tests recorded in Scotland has been well over the 5% World Health Organisation threshold for concern – however it has been reducing from a peak 7-day average of 8.2% on 22 October 2020 to a 7-day average of 4.8% on 9 December 2020. By comparison, the latest 7-day average of positive tests for the NHSGGC area is 5.8% and in Renfrewshire the 7-day average is currently 6.4% - having reduced from over 10% since October 2020.
- 1.9 Currently 7 care homes for older people in Renfrewshire have notified outbreaks, with 37 residents currently testing positive. The vast majority of residents are asymptomatic, are stable and the HSCP are seeing people recover. However, there have also sadly been 32 COVID-19 related deaths across the Renfrewshire care homes since the beginning of October 2020. Over the past four weeks, one independently operated care home has had a significant outbreak. Mass testing carried out in relation to this outbreak contributed significantly to a spike in numbers of positive cases identified in Renfrewshire on 17 November 2020.

- 1.10 On 25 November 2020 the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport announced plans to significantly expand testing in a national programme. From the beginning of December testing will be undertaken for all hospital admissions and by end of December this will also include increased routine testing of healthcare workers and professionals in the community. Testing for Care Home visitors will be available for designated visitors over the festive period and a national programme of lateral flow testing is being rolled out to include all care homes by February 2021.
- 1.11 Renfrewshire Council piloted the first lateral flow test, community asymptomatic testing centre in Scotland from 2 December 2020 to 9 December 2020 at Johnstone Town Hall. The aim of this approach was to identify the level of infection that exists in the community in people who have no symptoms with a view to further reducing the spread of the virus. The pilot was successful with just over 5,000 eligible residents and workers participating. The learnings from this pilot will be considered at a national level to inform the further roll out of testing and use of lateral flow tests in the New Year.
- 1.12 Preparations are now being made for the roll out of a national COVID-19 vaccination programme, with the HSCP and Council working closely with the Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board to plan for the imminent delivery of the programme locally, following commencement of the vaccination programme nationally from 8 December 2020.
- 1.13 The introduction of the 5-tier model of protective measures with the placement of Renfrewshire within the most restrictive level 4 measures for a period has had a significant impact on local communities and businesses and has impacted on the services provided by the Council and RLL in particular
- 1.14 Significant financial and welfare support has been provided to local businesses and communities by the Council and through programmes developed by the UK and Scottish Governments. These programmes are continuing to evolve at a rapid pace and this report seeks delegated authority for the Chief Executive to make arrangements for the distribution of financial and welfare support funds that may be created in line with the guidance provided by the Scottish Government, on behalf of the Council.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Council:
- i. notes the update provided on the Council's response to the COVID-19 crisis and the associated impact in terms of local communities and service provision;
 - ii. acknowledges the work being undertaken by the Council to support communities and businesses in line with national guidance;

- iii. authorises the Chief Executive to make arrangements for the distribution of financial and welfare support funds that may be created in line with the guidance provided by the Scottish Government, on behalf of the Council, and to decide on how those funds are distributed; and
 - iv. agrees that a report on the exercise of the authority granted in paragraph 2.1 (iii) be provided to elected members at the earliest opportunity.
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3. Current Position

- 3.1 Pandemic infections are known to impact on populations in a series of waves – peaks and troughs of infection. Over time, the full lockdown restrictions imposed in March 2020 in response to the first wave of infections successfully restricted the transmission of the virus across Scotland and led to a number of weeks during July and August 2020 where no deaths were recorded with COVID-19 in Renfrewshire and in Scotland. However, the first wave of the virus did lead to the deaths of 206 people in Renfrewshire with COVID-19. As the second wave of the virus began to impact in September 2020, deaths with COVID-19 also began to recur. So far in the second wave of the virus 87 people have died with COVID-19 in Renfrewshire.
- 3.2 The communities of Renfrewshire have recorded particularly high levels of test positivity (at times over 10% of tests taken were positive) – and have in recent weeks also been the communities with the highest number of positive cases per 100,000 population in Scotland. Analysis has shown that a small number of significant outbreaks has contributed to this position and in particular outbreaks within local care homes. It is worth noting however, that in general, due to a greater understanding about the nature of the virus, how it is transmitted and how it is best treated, the second wave of infections has led to fewer deaths overall and the restrictive measures imposed have been less severe than during the first wave of infection.
- 3.3 The number of cases associated with Schools, Early Learning and Childcare Centres has been a clear indicator of overall numbers of cases occurring in the community during the second wave of the pandemic. In more recent weeks there has been a reduction in the numbers of cases being picked up and reported through the schools, early learning and childcare centres and this is a positive sign that the level four protective measures put in place may have had a positive impact on reducing transmission of the virus within the wider community.

COVID-19 Cases in Renfrewshire and GGC Health Board area

- 3.4 Currently Renfrewshire has the fifth highest number of COVID-19 confirmed cases per 100,000 population in Scotland – after Clackmannanshire, Argyll and Bute, North Ayrshire and Glasgow. As the significant impact of cases identified through mass testing in Care Homes has naturally been removed from within figures over time, the proportion of COVID-19 confirmed cases per 100,000 has begun to reduce significantly and in a sustained way from 260 cases on 17 November 2020 (when Renfrewshire was the highest in Scotland) to 149 cases by 9 December 2020.
- 3.5 In recent weeks the proportion of positive tests recorded in Scotland has been well over the 5% World Health Organisation threshold for concern – however it has also been reducing from a peak 7-day average of 8.2% on 22 October 2020 to a 7-day average of 4.8% on 8 December 2020. By comparison, the latest 7-day average of positive tests for the NHSGGC area is 5.8% and in Renfrewshire the 7-day average is currently 6.4% - having reduced from over 10% since October 2020.
- 3.6 Positive cases from tests in Renfrewshire had a spike on 17 November 2020 - with 134 cases recorded that day – roughly double the daily numbers recorded on either side of that spike. The mass testing carried out in relation to a significant outbreak in a Renfrewshire Care Home was a major contributor to this spike in numbers of positive cases. While this figure is still fluctuating day by day, the current 7-day average daily figure is 38.
- 3.7 The highest daily number of positive cases reported in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board Area was 607 cases on 2 November 2020. The current 7-day average daily figure is 230.

Protecting the NHS

- 3.8 The system of restrictions used to combat the second wave of COVID-19 has been successful in allowing the NHS to continue to cope with demand, and to continue to provide ongoing care on a wider range of emergency and elective procedures than was the case during the first lockdown in March 2020. Hospital cases during the second wave of COVID-19 in Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board area peaked at higher levels around 2 November 2020 with 530 people in hospital with COVID-19, 21 of whom were in intensive care. On 8 December this had reduced to 358 people in hospital and 12 in intensive care.

Deaths

- 3.9 Sadly, deaths with COVID-19 are continuing. In Renfrewshire, a total of 293 people have died with COVID-19 since the outbreak of the virus. Of these 206 died in the first wave of the pandemic and 87 have died since 21 September 2020.

- 3.10 National Records of Scotland recorded 22 deaths with COVID-19 in Renfrewshire in week commencing 30 November 2020. 11 of these deaths took place in hospital and 10 in a care home and 1 at home or a non-hospital institution.
- 3.11 The most recent National Records of Scotland report (9 December 2020) shows that as at 6 December 2020, there had been a total of 5,868 deaths registered in Scotland where COVID-19 was mentioned on the death certificate.

Care Homes

- 3.12 As the impact of COVID-19 increases across communities, the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) is continuing to see the effect within care homes. Of the 23 care homes for older people across Renfrewshire, 1 is newly registered - Bridge of Weir and 3 are operated by the HSCP - Montrose, Hunterhill and Renfrew. At the time of writing all three HSCP operated care homes have no formally notified outbreaks. As previously highlighted the use of a range of testing and the activity of Test and Protect within the wider community means that the HSCP can identify a wider range and higher number of both residents and staff who are positive. The vast majority of residents are asymptomatic, are stable and the HSCP are seeing people recover.
- 3.13 The situation, however, remains fluid and the range of enhanced support and oversight delivered through the Daily Huddle and enhanced clinical and care governance arrangements remain in place. The HSCP continues to work closely with both Public Health and the Care Inspectorate. At the time of writing 7 care homes for older people in Renfrewshire have notified outbreaks, with 37 residents currently testing positive. Over the past four weeks, one independently operated care home has had a significant outbreak which has resulted in a significant increase in positive cases in care homes during this time. The mass testing carried out in relation to this outbreak contributed significantly to the spike in numbers of positive cases identified in Renfrewshire on 17 November 2020. There have also sadly been 32 COVID-19 related deaths across the Renfrewshire care homes since the beginning of October 2020.

Care Inspectorate Key Question 7 Inspections

- 3.14 During the pandemic, the Care Inspectorate, together with colleagues from Health Improvement Scotland and Health Protection Scotland, have been carrying out inspections of care homes for adults and older people. Inspections have a focus on answering the question (known as key question 7): "How good is our care and support during the COVID-19 pandemic?".

- 3.15 The scrutiny carried out by the Care Inspectorate is led by intelligence and based on risk. This means information is gathered, risks are assessed, and intensity of scrutiny is based on this. The Care Inspectorate also maintains oversight of care services through data gathering, concerns and complaints, notification requirements, registration and more, including video consultation and virtual visits (using Near Me) to services.

4 Management of the virus – 2nd Wave

- 4.1 This section of the report sets out the main terms of the Scottish Government's protective measures strategic framework and its impact on areas of frontline service and service delivery when a Council area moves between levels of protective measures.

Scotland's Strategic Framework – New protection levels

- 4.2 The Scottish Government confirmed its new five-tier framework to help suppress Coronavirus outbreaks across Scotland on 27 October 2020. It is intended to allow for rapid and flexible responses to be made on both a local and national basis using a range of measures and options, and to give a level of clarity and consistency to businesses and communities about the nature of intervention that would be applied at each level.
- 4.3 The types of restriction and protective measures at each level are based on improved knowledge about how the virus is transmitted and how it can be controlled, balanced with a desire to minimise some of the worst impacts of a full lockdown on the economy, wider health services and vulnerable individuals and communities. Within the tiered system of protective measures therefore, it is the intention that schools and other educational establishments remain open as far as possible, across all tiers; that general health services including elective surgeries be kept operational as far as possible; and controls be focused on the situations and settings most likely to lead to significant transmission of the virus. It is not intended to return to the previous shielding arrangements at any level – but there is specific advice for those who were previously Shielding provided within each tier.
- 4.4 In determining the level of intervention for each Council area, meetings take place between Scottish Government and key stakeholders including Councils to examine a range of indicators. These indicators include; number of cases per 100,000; the age profile of positive cases; forecasted cases; characteristics/containment of any local clusters; % of positive tests; and current and forecasted NHS capacity including ICU capacity.

4.5 The levels are:

- Level 0 – closest to normal life without a vaccine (similar to the arrangements experienced during August 2020)
- Level 1 – similar to Scotland's position mid-September, with tighter measures on meetings indoors (6 people from 2 households)
- Level 2 – no in-home socialising, some restrictions on events, leisure activities and hospitality hours – alcohol only with a meal
- Level 3 – Increased restrictions on hospitality businesses - no alcohol, restricted hours of operation, and limited travel into and out of the area
- Level 4 – closer to full lockdown, hospitality and non-essential shops closed

Renfrewshire's position in the Protection Level Measures

- 4.6 Due to the overall position of Renfrewshire in relation to the number of positive cases and the infection rates prevalent in the community on 17 November 2020 the First Minister announced that Renfrewshire would be placed in level four protective measures along with 10 other local authorities in west / central Scotland. The changes came into force on 20 November 2020 and remained in place until 11 December 2020 at which time the 11 Council areas were all moved down to level three protective measures.
- 4.7 As the Council moved back to level three protective measures some of the most restrictive protection measures were relaxed, this has allowed some hospitality; non-essential retail; gyms; leisure and entertainment facilities; close contact services such as hairdressers; visitor attractions; and holiday accommodation for tourism, to begin to operate again with strict operational controls in place.
- 4.8 Guidance on travel restrictions also became law on 20 November 2020 – meaning travel into or out of Council areas in levels three or four is only permitted for certain essential purposes. Similarly, people living in lower level areas elsewhere in Scotland must not travel into a level three or level four area other than for essential purposes and there should be no non-essential travel between Scotland and other parts of the UK. Public transport should only be used for essential purposes.
- 4.9 Unlike the March lockdown, schools remain open at all levels of the protective measures, as well as early learning and childcare services.
- 4.10 People continue to be advised to work from home wherever that is possible. Businesses which provide essential services can continue to operate, such as those supporting critical national infrastructure, courts and tribunals. Outdoor workplaces, construction, manufacturing and veterinary services also can remain open.

- 4.11 In terms of shielding, there has been no return to full shielding advice, with no requirement for those previously shielding to stay at home or not to work. The focus is on supporting those individuals to manage their risk and on employers to support people to stay safe at work.

Communications

- 4.12 To support the moves between different levels of the protective measures, a comprehensive communications and engagement plan for communities, businesses and staff has been put in place.
- 4.13 Following each announcement of a change or prospective change a range of channels is used to provide key information on the changes, including social media, the local press and the Council website. Communities are encouraged to comply with each set of new measures to minimise the amount of time more restrictive measures are in place and reduce any adverse impact. Local partners are also supported to play their part by sharing these messages through their own channels.
- 4.14 The key messages for communications as the Council moved to level 3 measures on 11 December 2020 were:
- People must not visit any other household in their homes in any part of Scotland (limited exceptions apply)
 - It is safe for people to attend work, following safe travel advice and complying with workplace guidance
 - For those able to work from home, this should continue
 - People should not travel into or out of the level 3 area unless it is essential travel, for example *'those from outside Glasgow should not travel into the city to do Christmas shopping when retail reopens'*
 - All hospitality premises, including cafes, pubs and restaurants, will now be able to serve food and close at 6pm, without the sale of alcohol
 - Only six people from two households should meet in a hospitality setting or outdoors

Business Regulation

- 4.15 Business Regulation is an area where each change in guidance and legislation has a significant impact on workload. Each time the Council area changes tier this has a significant impact on hospitality and retail services in particular, and the Business Regulation teams are required to support businesses to ensure that they understand and comply with the changes in guidance and legislation. Where necessary, enforcement action can be taken where businesses are not complying with legislation.
- 4.16 As the levels of restriction reduce - when Council areas are placed into a reduced level of protective measures, the scope for more businesses to begin to trade more normally increases. At each level it is for the Business Regulation team to understand and support compliance with the appropriate controls in place.

Children's Services

- 4.17 Throughout the second wave of the pandemic there has been a focus on maintaining educational and childcare opportunities as far as possible. The Scottish Government has updated their guidance on reducing the risk in schools to ensure a safe and supportive environment for learning and teaching during the coronavirus pandemic. This includes specific enhanced measures for schools and early learning and childcare settings in local authorities at levels three and four in the system of tiered protection levels.
- 4.18 On 7 October 2020 the Deputy First Minister made a statement to parliament confirming that there would be no external assessment or examinations for national 5 courses. The SQA, in partnership with all stakeholders, has developed an alternative certification model. On 8 December 2020 the Deputy First Minister also announced there would be no external assessments of Higher or Advanced Higher courses in 2020/21. It is anticipated that a model of alternative certification will be implemented similar to the agreed model being implemented for national 5. Extensive planning will take place to ensure that the application of these models is robust in all secondary schools.

Care Home Visiting

- 4.19 On 12 October 2020, the Scottish Government released guidance for care homes on phasing in the re-introduction of visiting. Essential visits will be supported sympathetically at every protection level throughout the pandemic and such visits will be supported where it is imperative that friends or family see their loved one. This might include circumstances where it is clear that the person's health and wellbeing is changing for the worse, where visiting may help with communication difficulties, to ease significant personal stress or other pressing circumstances.
- 4.20 On 4 December 2020, the Scottish Government issued a Christmas and New Year guidance for adult care homes and visitors. The guidance seeks to balance the serious risks posed by the virus to care home residents with the ability to see friends and family throughout the holiday period. This will be supported by the use of testing for care home visitors being rolled out in the programme detailed in Section 5 of this report. Following this, a local decision-making framework will be published to support a longer term and more nuanced approach to decisions on visiting which will take account of a number of local factors and is proportionate to the assessment of risk. This will allow increased tailoring of visiting arrangements based on local circumstances.

Renfrewshire Leisure

- 4.21 Due to the nature of its services Renfrewshire Leisure has been significantly impacted by higher tiers of restriction during the second wave of the virus. Under the most restrictive level four measures, Renfrewshire Leisure was required to temporarily close all leisure centres, gyms, swimming pools, libraries and the heritage centre. Renfrewshire Leisure reflects these restrictions and suspended in-venue operations in leisure members' direct debit payments or annual terms as relevant for any period impacted. Provision of live-streamed and on-demand leisure exercise classes has been increased to meet demand.
- 4.22 Community Halls are closed except where exemptions are granted, for example to deliver out of school care and COVID response work.

Specific COVID-19 Guidance for Festive Period

- 4.23 Scottish government guidance for the relaxation of travel and household restrictions for the festive period has been issued. Over the period from 23 December 2020 to 27 December 2020 Christmas "bubbles" of up to three households will be permitted to form in Scotland, each of which should contain no more than eight people. Children under the age of 12 will not count towards the total number of people in the bubble. Travel restrictions will be lifted across all four nations to allow people to visit close friends and relatives and form these temporary households. Those in a bubble can only gather in a private home, outdoors or at a place of worship – but should not meet in a hospitality setting or form more than one bubble. For those meeting in someone's home, it is permissible to stay overnight.
- 4.24 Students travelling home at the end of term will be able to take voluntary COVID-19 tests through their college or university prior to travelling. As part of a number of measures to support a safe return home, students are also being asked to take extra care in the period leading up their departure, only going out for essential purposes such as learning, exercise and food shopping. Students returning home from University or College will immediately form part of and be included as one of their family's household.

5 Mitigation of the Virus

- 5.1 In recent weeks a number of national programmes have come forward that have brought the first concrete advances (through technical and scientific developments) in the ability of public agencies to begin to better understand and ultimately control the spread and impact of the virus.

Expansion of COVID-19 Testing Strategy

- 5.2 On 25 November 2020 the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport announced plans to significantly expand COVID-19 testing in a national programme. This further expansion is now possible because of increases in testing capacity - coming from the 3 new NHS regional hub laboratories, from Lighthouse laboratories, and from the development of new testing options.
- 5.3 From the beginning of December, testing has been undertaken for all hospital admissions to emergency departments, acute assessment centres, maternity units and emergency mental health units. By mid-December this will include all medical and surgical elective admissions.
- 5.4 Routine testing of healthcare workers is also being extended to twice weekly and will include everyone working in patient facing roles in all hospitals; the Scottish Ambulance Service; COVID-19 Assessment Centres in the community; and healthcare professionals who visit care homes. This will also be fully rolled out by the end of December.
- 5.5 Testing in social care will also be extended and it is intended will include lateral flow testing of designated visitors to care homes on the day of a visit, to ensure that if the test is positive, family members can take immediate action to isolate and avoid the harm that could have arisen during a visit.
- 5.6 Renfrewshire will be included in the programme to deliver home test kits to all care homes nationally prior to 14 December 2020. This will be supplemented by PCR testing from 21 December 2020 and will allow designated visitors to access tests over the 3-week festive period. Although no test is 100% accurate, testing provides an additional layer of protection and will increase the confidence of visitors at this time. Risk assessments and protocols for indoor visiting will remain in place for each care home, operating in line with their current circumstances.
- 5.7 On its own, testing doesn't give risk-free visiting, but combined with appropriate PPE and strict hand hygiene the roll out of lateral flow testing to include all care homes by February 2021 will allow more relatives to visit their loved ones, reduce isolation and loneliness for care home residents and give providers the additional confidence they need to facilitate and support more visits.
- 5.8 From mid-January 2021, the national testing programme will be being extended wider into the community to include home care staff, including permanent and visiting staff and personal assistants to a person's home; and covering residential settings; sheltered housing and day care. This part of the programme will begin in those local authority areas with the highest prevalence of the virus at the time and expand out from there to cover the whole sector by March 2021.

- 5.9 Asymptomatic testing to entire groups and communities has already begun. From the return of the school term in January 2021, a number of pathfinder testing programmes on deliverability in the school environment will be undertaken with the objective of establishing a sustainable programme of asymptomatic testing amongst school-based staff.

Community Asymptomatic Testing Centre Pilot – Johnstone Town Hall

- 5.10 To support the development of the national testing programme, Renfrewshire Council agreed to run a community asymptomatic testing pilot facility at Johnstone Town Hall on behalf of the Scottish and UK Governments. The facility operated from 2 December to 9 December 2020 providing an opportunity for those living or working in Johnstone, who do not have any COVID-19 symptoms, to take a test which processes a result in around 30 minutes.
- 5.11 This pilot of the 'lateral flow' test process identified asymptomatic people who were unaware they were carrying the virus as they had no symptoms. It also gave a clearer picture of the overall prevalence of coronavirus within the Johnstone community. Just over 5,000 tests were undertaken during this pilot period – some of which were through the provision of home testing kits to around 450 residents on the former shielding list. A significant communications and marketing campaign was developed to encourage local people to participate and support the pilot using the full range of social and traditional media as well as direct contact with residents and service users in the Johnstone area. In the end over a quarter of eligible residents and employees in the area attended the testing site.

COVID-19 Vaccine Programme

- 5.12 As reported in the media, the first COVID-19 vaccine, known as the Courageous (Pfizer) vaccine was approved for use in the UK on 2 December 2020, having met the strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness set out by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. Other vaccines are also at an advanced stage of development and testing, and subject to approval by the regulators be made available on the NHS as part of the wider vaccination programme.
- 5.13 The vaccine began to be rolled out nationally the following week with the first vaccinations delivered on 8 December 2020. The Chief Medical Officer has advised that priority, based on clinical risk, will be given to staff and residents in care homes for older adults, and other frontline healthcare workers. People over the age of 80 will then receive their injections, as supply allows. The Courageous vaccine requires to be stored at very low temperatures between minus 70 and minus 80 degrees centigrade. This places challenges on the transportation and distribution of the vaccine. It also requires to be delivered as a two-stage process with the second injection three weeks following the first. It is expected that the person receiving the vaccine will be protected around a week after the second injection.

The UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation is currently preparing guidance on all of the priority groups for immunisation, and further information will be provided on plans for the roll out of a wider vaccination programme as additional guidance is published and additional vaccines become available.

- 5.14 Delivery of the vaccination programme is still at an early stage and will be subject to the availability and flow of the vaccine. Renfrewshire has established a joint Council and HSCP planning team to support the wider NHS GGC rollout programme, building on learning from the recent flu programme and mass testing pilot. An initial NHS GGC vaccination programme has commenced at the Louisa Jordan, focused on care home staff and frontline NHS staff working in red zones i.e. intensive care units. This includes staff working in Renfrewshire care homes, who have started to be vaccinated. Planning is also underway to deliver the vaccine at a local centre(s), which may include the Royal Alexandra Hospital (RAH) and St Mirren Football Stadium, and also across our care homes, subject to vaccine availability and the environmental conditions set out in paragraph 5.2.

6 Support for business and communities

- 6.1 Significant financial support has been made available through programmes funded by both the UK and Scottish Governments to seek to mitigate the adverse impact on individuals and businesses that are unable to live and work as normal due to the restrictions placed on them under the initial lockdown period, and the tiered system of protective measures now being used during the second wave of the pandemic. The scale and range of financial support measures put in place is unprecedented with almost £30m distributed directly to businesses in Renfrewshire by the Council since March to help them mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and the operational restrictions imposed by the Government to tackle the pandemic.
- 6.2 Updated packages of funding are continuing to be developed with the most recent announcement on additional funding was made by the Finance Secretary on 9 December 2020.

Business Grants

- 6.3 The business support that had been made available was reported to Council on 25 June 2020. An updated and amended business grant programme was introduced from 2 November 2020 to provide ongoing support to businesses impacted by increased and extended protective measures. The grants available were primarily to support those required to close or restrict services during the second wave of the pandemic. When Renfrewshire was operating under level four protective measures approximately 1,120 businesses were impacted in this way.

- 6.4 More detail on the various statistics relating to business supports (including the UK furlough and self-employed schemes) are contained within the report on the Economic Recovery Plan also included on the Council agenda on 17 December 2020.

Further Funding Announced – 9 December 2020

- 6.5 On 9 December 2020 the Finance Secretary, Ms Forbes announced an allocation of £185m for new and additional business support to be distributed in 2021, providing support on a sector by sector basis. This will include grant schemes for: Tourism (including for self-catering, B&Bs and guest houses, travel agents and tour operators); the events sector; the wedding sector; hospitality; live music and cultural venues; the arts; taxi drivers; indoor football centres; brewing sector and mobile close contact services (such as hairdressers). The fine detail of each of these schemes will be provided in coming weeks.
- 6.6 In addition to the grant support outlined above, the Scottish Government has previously announced two other funding streams for Councils to distribute:
- **£30 million discretionary fund** to enable Local Authorities (in all Levels) to provide additional support for businesses where they consider that necessary or justified - for example, for businesses in supply chains, or to taxi drivers suffering an indirect effect.
 - **Additional £15 million for newly self-employed people** (in all Levels) who have not been able to access other forms of support.
- 6.7 The Finance Secretary anticipated that her announcement would help local authorities begin to make their individual decisions about how they will use the £30m discretionary fund, taking account of the sectors the government is supporting and making considered local determinations on where to target the resources available to them.
- 6.8 It is anticipated that the Scottish Government will make further announcements and issue guidance on the specific funds to be given to local authorities in coming weeks to tackle the social and economic consequences of the pandemic. It is likely that the Council will require to make arrangements for the distribution of those funds within timescales that would make it very difficult to get the Board approvals that are usually required. In these circumstances, it is proposed as a temporary measure that the Chief Executive is given the authority to make arrangements for the distribution of the funds.

Self-Isolation Welfare Support Support for people team

- 6.9 The Council has been asked to contact all people self-isolating locally in order to offer support in relation to aspects such as wellbeing, financial issues and access to food and medicine. Data is provided on a daily basis by NHS NSS to the Council, with relevant data sharing agreements in place to ensure this data can be shared and used by local authority officers.
- 6.10 Up to 8 December 2020, the Council has been provided with details for 3,720 self-isolating residents. All residents have been called and successful contact has been made with over 91% of individuals. 181 referrals have been made for further support from the neighbourhood hubs or for financial support through the Self Isolation Support Grant. A high number of the people that have been contacted by the team, have opted out of any further contact as no support is required by them. The low number of onwards referrals correlates to previous trends in terms of requests for support from people self-isolating, which have also been very low in recent months.
- 6.11 Officers from the team have also been handling referrals that come in through the national helpline to the Council and are directed through the Customer Service Centre.

Self-Isolating Support Grant (£500 payment)

- 6.12 The Scottish Government has committed to providing a grant of £500 to individuals who are in receipt of low-income benefits and who lose income as a result of being required to self-isolate to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It will provide them with the financial support they need to meet their basic needs during the 14-day period in which they are unable to work. Using the Scottish Welfare Fund as the legal and delivery mechanism, applications for Self-Isolating Support Grant's opened on 12 October, with applicants who were asked to self-isolate on or after 28 September able to apply during their 14 day isolation period.
- 6.13 Applications can be made at any point during the individual's 14 day self-isolation period. The initial key tests of eligibility for a Self-Isolation Support Grant are whether the applicant:
- has been required to self-isolate by Test and Protect Scotland;
 - is employed or self-employed;
 - is unable to work from home and will face reduced earnings as a result of self-isolating; and
 - is currently receiving or has been awarded but not yet received a payment of Universal Credit or other specified means tested benefits.

6.14 On 30 November the First Minister announced changes to the SISG eligibility criteria. The changes widen the range of people able to claim a support grant and provide decision makers with greater scope to make an award where all the other criteria are met. The changes took effect from 7 December 2020 and are noted below:

- A parent/guardian or carer can make an application for a SISG where they meet the other eligibility criteria and any child they are responsible for has been asked to self-isolate from school or nursery and the parent is not able to work
- Where an applicant is not in receipt of Universal Credit, where the local authority believes they would qualify for it if they applied, they will be treated as if they are.

6.15 Data on the number of applications and awards made as at Monday 7 December is shown in the table below.

Week commencing	No. Applications	No. Awarded	No. Declined
Up to 21/11/2020	306	109	197
22/11/20	38	22	16
30/11/20	40	17	23
Total	384	148	236

6.16 The main reasons for an application being declined up until the eligibility criteria changed on 6 December are as noted below:

- Not in receipt of or eligible for a qualifying benefit,
- Earnings have not been impacted as a result of being asked to self-isolate
- The applicant has not been formally requested to self-isolate by NHS

Support for Low Income Families

6.17 On 30 November 2020, The First Minister announced funding of £100m to help low-income people over the winter period, including direct payments of £100 to be made before Christmas to all families with children in receipt of free school meals. £25m of the funding will be distributed to vulnerable people through local authorities, £15m will go to charities, with further allocations to help the homeless and tackle fuel poverty.

6.18 This announcement followed the statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security on 20 October 2020 when it was announced that the Scottish government would make £10m available for free school meal provision over the Christmas holidays, February half-term break and Easter. The statement also noted that there will be an £18m fund available to Councils to tackle financial insecurity, in addition to the £57m already made available through the Scottish Welfare Fund designed to help people meet housing, fuel and food costs.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – although at this stage not fully quantified, the Council will experience a wide range of significant financial pressures arising from the impact of the pandemic on the population as well as the economic and social disruption caused by the associated restrictions being deployed by national governments. Significant financial pressures will emerge in a wide range of forms from loss of income, exceptional service costs, significant increase in demand for services, the need for additional and new interventions, urgent and immediate support arrangements and services from the Council to help individuals, families and businesses across Renfrewshire as well as the Council's workforce. The Scottish Government has provided a range of funding announcements to provide specific support via local authorities to both individuals and businesses as well as a degree of general funding to assist local authorities in managing immediate financial pressures. Engagement will continue between COSLA and the Scottish Government regarding further funding as the period of emergency extends.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – the Council's workforce represents a major part of the local population and as such is being impacted directly by the spread of confirmed cases, but much more significantly by the public health directions for self-isolation given to those displaying symptoms and those with family members displaying symptoms as well as those in the at risk groups instructed to pro-actively implement strict social distancing arrangements. Full support and communication are being provided to all staff members to ensure they remain fully informed of the developing situation and where appropriate and practical, are being supported to work safely at home and or safely return to active work once recovered or free of recommended self-isolation periods. The impact of these factors will increase exponentially over coming days and weeks and therefore the scale of availability across the Council's workforce will come under unprecedented pressures. Working closely with national government, partners and trade unions the Council will by necessity be required to actively manage and redeploy staffing resources to meet the most critical services over this exception emergency period.
3. **Community/Council Planning** – Covid-19 impacts on the operations of Council partners and on services to the community.
4. **Legal** – none
5. **Property/Assets** – As facilities start to open in line with the Scottish Government Routemap, adjustment may have to be made to physical spaces to allow for physical distancing and to comply with relevant guidance. This will also apply to outdoor assets.
6. **Information Technology** – ICT are working to ensure staff have the capability to work from home wherever possible to reduce social contact in line with government and health guidance

7. **Equality & Human Rights**
- (a) 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.
 - (b) As outlined in the report itself, the Council will need to continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 and the disproportionate impacts it may have on certain communities or groups of people across Renfrewshire, including in relation to poverty, ethnicity, gender and disability amongst other protected characteristics.
8. **Health & Safety** – Advice and guidance is being given to protect the health and safety of employees and service users when carrying out priority services for the Council 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 the Council.
10. **Risk** – Due to the severity of the global pandemic and Covid-19, there is a risk to the delivery of the services with staff levels being reduced. This is being closely monitored by the Emergency Management Team. Business Continuity Plans have been reviewed and the risk has been added to the Corporate Risk Register.
11. **Privacy Impact** - None.
12. **COSLA Policy Position** – COSLA Leaders have continued to meet very fortnight during the crisis and there has been ongoing dialogue in relation to emerging issues, with specific work being undertaken in relation to the significant financial constraints facing local authorities and education recovery amongst others.
13. **Climate Risk** – The pandemic has led to fairly significant changes to behaviours in terms of the mode and level of transport use and there are a range of emerging opportunities to promote active travel going forward. The Council has committed to work towards having net zero carbon emission by 2020, and the impact of COVID 19 will require to be reflected in future climate planning arrangements.

List of Background Papers

None

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