

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL**15 December 2021****Report by Chief Executive****COVID-19 RECOVERY - UPDATE****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

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

RECOMMENDATION

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

BACKGROUND

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

4. In addition, in the reports considered by the Council on 8 September and 27 October, further information was provided on how continuing to respond to the effects of the pandemic was impacting on the ability of departments to deliver “normal” services and had contributed to significant backlogs across all departments. The reports also referred to challenges still ahead not least of which was managing public expectation that services should all be back to normal,

Omicron

5. The new discovery of a variant of concern, Omicron, in November 2021 has attracted significant Government, scientific and media attention. As more is understood about the impacts of the new variant, there is potential for further restrictions to be imposed, with resultant further impacts on service delivery.

6. At the time of writing, there has not been any announcement of further restrictions in Scotland over and above those protections currently in place. There continues to be an emphasis on home working, the wearing of face coverings, ventilation and hygiene. Individuals are encouraged to undertake rapid LFD tests regularly, particularly ahead of socialising during the festive period.

7. One significant potential impact from the early emergence of Omicron is the need for close contacts to isolate for 10 days, regardless of vaccination status. This differs from other variants, where close contacts do not need to isolate if they PCR test negative and are fully vaccinated. There is significant potential for Omicron to impact on staff availability as case numbers increase – particularly if all close contacts are required to isolate.

8. In response to the emergence of Omicron, there has been a significant ramping up of vaccination activity, following updated recommendations by the JCVI. Over 18s will now be eligible for a booster dose, and at a minimum of three months after their second dose.

Additionally, those aged 12-18 will now be eligible for a second dose. It is estimated that because of these recommendations being accepted, in excess of one million people nationally are now eligible for a further vaccine.

REPORT

9. The purpose of this report is to provide a further update to Members on work being carried out across the Council since the previous report, and should be read in the context of the previous update reports presented to the [Emergencies Committee in May](#), the [Council in June](#), the [Council in October](#), the [Council in December](#), the [Council in June 2021](#), the [Council in September 2021](#) and most recently the [Council on 27 October 2021](#).

10. Given that a full update was provided in October, this report only contains a summary of what has changed since then. It also reflects that the workload on the Council still remains extremely high.

Mass Vaccination Clinics

11. Carmichael Hall and Barrhead Health and Care Centre remain operational as vaccination clinics and provide ongoing COVID-19 vaccinations, as well as seasonal flu vaccines.

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

13. Vaccination of the population remains the most important line of defence to slow down the spread and severity of the virus. Therefore, work continues with our NHS partners to maximise the opportunities for our residents to be vaccinated with additional clinics scheduled and it is likely that the vaccination centres will remain operational during January and February 2022.

14. Recently announced expansions of the COVID-19 booster vaccination programme to include all over 18s will have an impact upon the vaccination programme and centres. The Council's vaccination programme Single Point of Contact officer remains in close contact with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde colleagues, as well as neighbouring local authorities.

COVID-19 Testing

15. Testing remains a significant element of the Scottish Government's pandemic response. The Mobile Testing Unit (MTU) for symptomatic persons continues to be located at the Greenlaw Works (Business Centre). This site remains well utilised, operating Monday to Friday via Government portal bookings. The NHS have confirmed that the Greenlaw MTU will be closed on 25-28 December (inclusive of both dates) and 1-4 January (inclusive). Additionally there will be early closures (13.00) on both 24 and 31 December.

16. The Council is currently operating two Community Testing buses in various locations throughout East Renfrewshire. Busy shopping centres will be targeted over the festive period. The buses have also played a significant part in assisting Glasgow City Council with testing during the recent COP26 event.

17. An additional MTU will remain operational at the rear of the Spiersbridge Offices until at least the end of January. This is bookable through the Government portal, but allows walk-ins and offers PCR testing. The NHS have confirmed that the Mobile Testing Unit at Spiersbridge is planning to be closed during the festive period from 23 December to 5 January.

18. The Council can request additional Scottish Ambulance Service operated MTUs similar to the one operating at Spiersbridge, to enhance existing testing arrangements. This allows targeting of specific communities where spikes of the virus have occurred, as well as enhancement of the testing offer where case rates are high or variants of concern have been identified.

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

Annual leave

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

Environment Department

21. As in previous reports and other departments, the Environment Department is certainly not in any way “back to normal”. Considerable resources are dedicated to supporting COVID response elements such as mass testing, mass vaccination and mobile testing. This has displaced resources from other areas of work, creating backlogs. This will continue to build/exist while resources are so heavily devoted to key public health protective measures.

Economic Development

22. As per previous updates, Economic Development staff have had additional responsibilities in relation to COVID business grants. This has resulted in more than £21m being paid to a wide range of local businesses and taxi drivers since the start of the pandemic. The service is prioritising key elements of its service plan, to be delivered in the remainder of 2021/22. They will also continue to process the next tranche of COVID business support grants.

Corporate Health and Safety Unit

23. Corporate Health and Safety Unit officers continue to devote significant resource to COVID related issues. Approximately 50% of the Service is now dedicated to business as usual activity, with the remaining time supporting COVID matters, including risk assessment reviews for service tasks and for buildings. COVID issues continue to have the potential to affect the Council meeting legal compliance requirements. The issues are partly that the service is not permitted to address these under remaining restrictions, and also the demand placed on the service for updated risk assessments.

24. The existing backlog of work will make new responsibilities difficult to fulfil. Relevant Health & Safety policies and information require updating, particularly those that have not been progressed in light of the pandemic response. It is imperative that the focus of the Corporate Health & Safety Unity (beyond COVID-19 work) is on areas of legal compliance. As such, there is no capacity for other matters and there will not be for some time to come.

Neighbourhood Services

25. “Work bubbles” remain a requirement within Neighbourhood Services, with the aim of containing any possible spread of COVID-19 amongst essential frontline personnel, protecting staff and essential services. The longer-term continuation of bubbles has the potential to considerably hamper next season’s grass cutting.

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

27. There remains concern in relation to the available pool of HGV drivers, which may leave the Council in a position where it does not have the required HGV employee numbers to facilitate essential services (primarily the collection of residential and trade waste). Contractors are also experiencing similar issues, particularly affecting the Household Waste and Recycling Centre at Barrhead. Neighbourhood Services are working in partnership with contractors to resolve this.

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

Trading Standards

29. Trading Standards played a significant and leading role in enforcing and advising businesses on the Regulations restricting trading activities during COVID-19. This led to a significant shift in resources away from the core service planned activity for 2019/20 and 2020/21. The service continues to prioritise key elements of its service plan for delivery in the remainder of 2020/21 while continuing to monitor and advise traders in relation to COVID-19. Key priority delivery has been supported through creative risk assessments and new ways of working.

Environmental Health

30. All Environmental Health staff have undertaken additional COVID responsibilities, which have been unpredictable in complexity, often unique and very time consuming.

31. The Environmental Health Service will continue to work at a national level liaising with other local authorities and partner organisational to promote the adoption of the baseline measures and enforcement of the COVID certification measures.

32. The Society of Chief Environmental Health Officers of Scotland continue to recommend extending the COVID Compliance Officer funding made available from the Scottish Government until 31 March 2022 and is co-ordinating with COSLA and SOLACE at every opportunity.

33. The Service will continue to prioritise Coronavirus related enquiries including Test & Protect notifications, clusters, outbreaks, Community Testing forums, internal enquiries from other services and supporting Asymptomatic Testing and Vaccination Centres. However, as detailed in previous reports, it remains the case that the ability to perform the full range of functions in an effective manner has been compromised.

34. The workload of Environmental Health continues to increase in line with the number of other Council Services working through their own backlogs. There has been a significant spike in Public Health work such as the re-introduction of Food safety visits and a Food Safety Audit due from Food Standards Scotland due early in the New Year. Planning applications, which often require an Environmental Health input, have also begun to increase.

Housing

35. Homeless and Housing Advice services have reintroduced face-to-face meetings in homes and in Council buildings. At present, most customers are opting for telephone interviews. Housing Officers have also reintroduced face-to-face visits in tenants' homes to provide support and assistance. Face-to-face interactions were reintroduced following discussions with Health and Safety, with a view to ensuring the continued safety for customers and staff

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

37. Rent arrears have continued to rise through 2021/22, in light of the negative impact the pandemic has had on family incomes. The return of home visits means that officers are able to discuss issues in the tenant's home to address arrears. Additionally, Housing are taking advantage of the Tenants Grant Fund provided by the Scottish Government. This fund is designed to be used to prevent both social and private tenants losing their homes due to the financial impacts of COVID-19. However, this fund is designed to prevent eviction and as most social landlords have opted not to aggressively pursue COVID arrears the fund is likely to be focused more on the private sector. While formal recovery actions, such as notice of proceedings and the courts, have resumed these actions will only be taken where all other options to prevent arrears and recovery actions have been exhausted.

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

39. Planned improvement works such as kitchens commenced in the autumn, beginning with the 2019-20 backlog. Housing Services continue to work through the required procurement issues to ensure appropriate contracts are in place. However, the construction industry is still experiencing a shortage of some materials, as well as changeable pricing. This may cause delays to the planned works.

Property and Technical Services

40. Supply chain issues have continued to affect the construction industry, influencing pricing and completion in some circumstances. Property and Technical Services continue to work with other services and with Procurement to try to mitigate both cost and time impacts to projects. Technical Services continue to support services in realising agreed capital plan aspirations and meeting the challenges faced.

41. Ventilation in Council premises remains a primary focus for the Property Services Team. Property Services continue to liaise with externally appointed ventilation engineers to assess properties. This includes undertaking any works identified to comply with Government Guidance. Progress in the ventilation programme will be dependent on the availability of contractors, materials and access to buildings.

42. Carbon Dioxide monitors have been installed to all Education teaching areas. These are fixed/permanent and provide real-time information over the Internet to staff who can monitor the position on a dashboard. Property Services and Education collaborated on this undertaking following earlier Scottish Government announcements of funding and reporting, as outlined in previous reporting.

Development Management and Building Standards

43. Development Management and Building Standards continue to be able to carry out statutory duties but with protective measures in place to minimise the risk of COVID-19. Both services continue with limited public interaction, with officers primarily working from home.

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

45. There are high levels of householder applications, particularly for extensions and garden rooms. The additional workload has resulted in a backlog in processing planning application, which has been exacerbated by staff shortages and additional online demand seeking advice, reporting unauthorised work and complaining about service problems/delays.

46. Public and business demand on Development Management continues to be very high, almost certainly due to the desire for lifestyle / employment changes across society.

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

Strategy/Local Development Plan

48. As reported previously the Examination of Proposed LDP2 by reporters appointed by Scottish Ministers took longer than expected. The Council has however now received the Examination Report and, in October 2021, the Council approved the Proposed Modifications as per the Examination Report and agreed to submit the Plan to Scottish Ministers. Adoption of Proposed LDP2 is anticipated early in 2022 after which, work will commence on the preparation of LDP3.

49. Timescales for the preparation of the annual Housing Land audit, Vacant and Derelict land and employment monitoring have also been impacted by COVID restrictions.

Roads & Transportation

50. Roads are continuing with their revenue and capital programme without any significant issues at present. Concerns remain in relation to issues surrounding HGV drivers and their potential to present issues with delivering winter maintenance. This concern is exacerbated by potential COVID impacts among staff. Additionally, there is reliance on Neighbourhood Services to deliver Winter Maintenance. Given they will face the same issues outlined above, this could further adversely affect the delivery of the Winter Maintenance programme.

Education Department

Response to COVID -19

51. The Education Department continues to face considerable pressure from the ongoing impact of COVID, in particular the challenge of balancing the response to the pandemic with the need to focus on recovery to support children and young people with their learning and wellbeing. The challenge for our schools and nurseries in balancing these competing pressures cannot be underestimated.

52. There remains high levels of disruption in schools due to pupil and staff absence. In line with the national approach to contact tracing and testing, many of these absences are short term, often only 1 or 2 days, however, a large number of staff and pupils can often be absent at any one time. In addition, these absences tend to be concentrated in particular schools during certain periods, with a correlation between absence and community case numbers, as is to be expected. Whilst the rates of absence remain higher than any normal year, attendance rates in schools in East Renfrewshire continue to be amongst the highest in the country, with attendance at the end of November 91.9%.

53. Facilities Management continues to face challenges with staff shortages across the service and whilst the department has been promoting positions through a range of channels, including social media and job fairs, these have not yet been as successful as hoped. Officers are working closely with other departments across the Council to advise and monitor staff numbers to ensure ongoing service delivery.

54. In line with the Scottish Government's national approach, all schools and nurseries continue to encourage twice weekly Lateral Flow Device (LFD) at-home testing for staff and secondary school pupils. Given the continuing prevalence of COVID across communities, this testing programme is an important mitigation in ensuring we can minimise the risks of transmission within establishments and keep staff and pupils as safe as possible. The department continues to work with the Scottish Government to encourage full participation in the testing programme amongst staff and pupils.

55. Given the increasing concern regarding the 'Omicron variant', the department continues to liaise with the Council's Environmental Health team and the NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde Public Health Protection Unit around any further mitigations required within our schools and nurseries.

Ongoing Recovery

56. Ahead of the Christmas holidays, all schools and nurseries continue to carefully plan any festive events, weighing up their responsibilities to maintain health and safety with an understandable desire from staff, pupils and parents for a return to more normal activities and celebrations following the disruption of the last 2 years. It should be noted that the guidance for education settings does remain significantly more restrictive than the guidance in place across most other sectors and, as such, there are greater restrictions on the types of events that are able to take place. All head teachers have been working closely with their wider school and nursery communities to organise appropriate activities in line with both national and departmental guidance.

57. In November Education Scotland carried out national thematic inspections of Early Learning and Childcare settings and schools with a focus on supporting recovery. Four East Renfrewshire establishments were selected as part of the national review. An ELC setting, a primary school, a special school and a secondary school. The visits to each establishment focused on how our establishments are supporting learners during the current pandemic, in particular the work that is being undertaken to support learning and wellbeing. The inspectors met with a range of stakeholders including staff, parents and pupils.

58. All four of our establishments were commended on the support they are providing children, young people and their families, with Education Scotland highlighting practice that they would like to share nationally as case studies within the report. Strengths identified across our establishments included:-

- Empowerment of staff and learners
- The positive relationships between learners, staff and parents
- The engagement of learners in their learning

- Staff recognition of the needs of learners and how they creatively respond to improve wellbeing, address learning loss and develop resilience
- Targeted interventions for equity groups
- Partnership working
- High quality Career Long Professional Learning, especially around digital learning
- Staff feeling supported with a real team approach to recovery

59. The department continues to work closely with the Corporate Health and Safety Unit (CHSU) and Trust to implement the safe resumption of school lets. Phase 2, which includes children and young people groups such as the Scouts and Guides, is now underway, with 63% of clubs having now resumed activities, with the remainder set to resume in early 2022. The resumption of clubs and groups further supports the wellbeing of children and young people.

60. Work continues on the planning of Phase 3 which includes adult sports clubs and activities, along with all other remaining lets. All activities remain subject to ongoing risk assessments and the department will continue to ensure the safety of staff and pupils, as well as those attending such clubs, is fully considered ahead of Phase 3.

61. Schools and nurseries continue to see an impact of COVID on the wellbeing and behaviour of children and young people. The Healthier Minds Hub receives a high number of referrals for mental wellbeing support for children and young people and, as a result, it has been necessary to increase the capacity of the Hub team. The department has supported this through the secondment of a teacher and the recruitment of two additional Educational Psychology Assistants to the service.

62. Due to growing concern over the increasing number of children and young people who are not accessing school due to mental health issues, the Education Department is developing a range of measures to support this 'emotionally based school avoidance' group of children and young people. This includes:-

- Educational Psychologists completing an audit to gain an accurate picture of the number of children and young people impacted and main influences in inhibiting attendance at school
- Developing a package of support including:
 - Short term intervention planned to support transition back into school
 - Development of online resources
 - Family Support
 - Professional learning and guidance for schools

HSCP

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

HSCP Vaccination Programme

64. In October 2021 the HSCP commenced the COVID -19 booster and flu vaccination programme for care homes. Over a two week period volunteers from across HSCP nursing teams visited all care homes to vaccinate residents and staff, mop up sessions have also taken place and will continue as required. HSCP nursing staff have administered 730 flu vaccinations and 628 COVID booster vaccinations within care homes in East Renfrewshire.

65. District nurses supported by other HSCP staff have made significant progress with the COVID-19 booster and flu vaccination programme for residents in their own homes. These residents are unable to attend the vaccinations centres due to frailty or other health issues. At the time of writing our nursing service has delivered 880 COVID boosters and 840 flu vaccinations to residents at home. This is in addition to the 3,500 visits they undertake to deliver care to people in their own homes each month.

PPE

66. The HSCP continues to run the PPE hub set up and run by HSCP staff. Distribution of essential protective supplies to HSCP staff, partner providers, carers and personal assistants. To date (December 2021) we have issued over 1 million gloves and aprons and 1.2 million masks.

67. HSCP district nursing and care home liaison nursing staff continue to support COVID testing for those unable to access testing centres. Staff are currently helping to facilitate testing in three residential homes and the housebound population who are symptomatic or asymptomatic testing for pre-op assessment.

Winter planning

68. The Scottish Government has announced additional funding to support health and social care providers tackle additional pressures during the challenging winter period ahead. Phase One of the additional resources is supporting 16 additional Health Care Assistants for the Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board area with local deployment to East Renfrewshire to enhance the capacity of our Care at Home Responder Service, Community Nursing and Community Rehabilitation teams.

69. We plan to strengthen our HSCP adult services front door to include a much wider MDT team approach, a focus on Technology Enabled Care and a more streamlined pathways for individuals and families to access our supports. East Renfrewshire HSCP have contributed to the development of a discharge hub across GGC hospitals to prevent hospital admissions and support timeous hospital discharges.

70. Phase Two of the funding programme sees an additional £2.1m for East Renfrewshire in 2021/22 to support Interim Care, Care at Home and Multi-disciplinary Teams. In 21/22 our model for interim care will be enhanced with funding to meet increased demand, the purchase of interim care beds, and development of our intensive support model at Bonnyton care home. This will help support rehabilitation and reablement and timely discharge to home/homely settings. For Care at Home, the additional resources will be used to address the accelerated demand pressures we are currently experiencing, increase frontline staff as well as management and support, and increase capacity for the Home First model and Technology Enabled Care. We will build the capacity of our multi-disciplinary teams across the HSCP including: developing our multi-disciplinary Front Door model and leadership arrangements; additional capacity for social work and our Care Home and Community Review Team; support for the wider GGC frailty hubs; and increased capacity for frailty practitioners, data and quality analysis and peripatetic business support.

Supporting people at home

71. Whilst the HSCP had to close our day services our learning disability staff have worked with our provider partners throughout the pandemic period to establish outreach and wraparound support for individuals. As part of our renewal and recovery focus some group work previously undertaken by staff at our older people's Kirkton service has recommenced and outreach supports are being developed.

72. Care at home has seen additional pressures due to a desire from more people to be supported at home and with more complex discharges. In the current phase of the pandemic the service is continuing to experiencing capacity pressures with higher than expected levels of staff absence and increased waiting times to access support. As a result of pressures and resource issues, in the last week of November there were: 6 people in hospital awaiting a package of care to facilitate a safe discharge; 23 people in the community awaiting services or an increase in support; and 4 people who have chosen to accept an intermediate care bed whilst awaiting services. External market provision has played a significant role in East Renfrewshire HSCP's previous track record and timely provision of care and support services. However, the volume of referrals accepted by partner providers has reduced by circa 50% and a small number of care packages have been handed back to the in house service where the external provided no longer has the staffing resource to safely support.

73. Our Hospital to Home team work to support timely and appropriate discharges from hospital. During the pandemic we have experienced significant issues around supporting 'adults with incapacity' and establishing appropriate guardianship/Power of Attorney arrangements. The team are currently managing the level of delays within acceptable levels. A significant proportion of care at home provision in East Renfrewshire is delivered by partner providers and we are seeing limited capacity internally. This, coupled with the reducing availability of care home placements, may impact on our delay numbers as the winter progresses. We continue to work with partner providers to encourage and assist them to take on complex cases as people are discharged from hospital.

74. Our Community Rehabilitation Teams continue to experience increased pressures due to the ongoing impacts and consequences of the COVID pandemic on the older population, with an increase in frailty and frailty related falls. The average of 40–50 referrals per week in 2019 / early 2020 has risen to and been sustained at 70-80 referrals per week over the past 20 months.

75. Across all mental health and recovery services, work is continuing to provide person-centred care throughout the challenges that COVID-19 has presented. The Older Adult Mental Health Team is currently going through some staff turnover within the nursing discipline and we are currently recruiting for a new Nursing Team Lead. The Peer support workers model has proved to be successful and we have increased investment to this assisting people to make a plan that helps maintain their mental health and wellbeing. The Mental Health Officer (MHO) team have filled some vacant positions recently, increasing the capacity to support the most vulnerable individuals who require statutory measures for their care and treatment. However, as is the case nationally there is a national shortage of MHOs. Challenges in relation to covering the MHO duty rota have been alleviated with support from the hospital to home team who have offered to collaborate to fill some slots.

76. Our locality social work teams are seeing a growing backlog of overdue community care reviews. This has resulted from a combination of additional support being required in the community and from the requirement for teams to focus on our pandemic response and most urgent need. As we progress our recovery and adapt to changing need we need to recognise this additional work pressure on our teams. We have recently created a designated resource to replicate the permanent care review work, and focus on completing a review for each individual currently awaiting a statutory community care review.

Support to Care Homes

77. Care Home flu and COVID -19 booster vaccinations commenced on 02 October with the first clinic taking place at Eastwood Court Care Home. In total, 12 Care Homes were covered in the programme over the space of 10 days including weekends, with a Lead Vaccinator appointed for each clinic. The initial Care Home vaccination programme was completed on 12 October, however this was subsequently followed up by a number of 'mop-up' clinics between 01 November and 03 December. The 'mop-up' clinics offered

appointments to residents who had been unable to receive the vaccination first time around due to issues around timescales since second Covid vaccination, other medical reasons and some issues in relation to consent. In total 454 care home residents (92%) received covid-19 booster vaccinations and 443 (89%) received flu vaccinations (percentages based on care home populations at the start of the programme).

78. Vaccinations were also offered to care home staff with 177 (27%) receiving the COVID-19 booster and 287 (43%) receiving the flu vaccine. Uptake among staff is lower than that of residents and is likely to be attributed to a number of factors such as timescales since second Covid-19 vaccination, and the possibility of staff making alternative arrangements for receiving the flu vaccine, or not wishing to receive the vaccination at all.

Support to Children and Families

79. Supporting children and young people's mental health continues to be a high priority, particularly as we seek to provide support to those impacted by the pandemic, and at the same time address the significant needs that existed prior to it. Whilst there are clinical solutions for a small proportion of these children the majority will not benefit from existing specialist mental health services as their difficulties are routed in the social and familial environment. The Family Wellbeing Service and the Healthier Minds Hub - the local tier 2 services - have received 678 referrals over the last year from GPs, school and other services and practitioners. If these services had not been in existence many of the children and young people would not have received any service to support them in managing their significant mental distress. Indeed a significant proportion would have been referred to CAMHS often inappropriately and it is very likely school attendance would have reduced sharply. Many more families would have sought targeted services such as social work, and GP attendance would have increased. The capacity of the tier 2 providers to respond to the significant needs of the children and young people referred will require continual monitoring to ensure risks are assessed and managed.

80. An emerging area of increasing need is from children and young people with a neuro developmental diagnosis or suspected diagnosis. Clinical pathway initiatives are being developed for neurodevelopmental cases which have been as high as 40% of the non-urgent caseloads in CAMHS and will require a multi-agency response. Across the HSCP and Council services are working together to quantify the level of need in order to be clearer on how to ensure service responses are effective and the workforce is sufficiently equipped to help children and their families in the right way.

81. As a result of the pandemic there has been a significant increase in the number of children with complex and additional support needs who have become looked after. This year alone the number of children and young people accommodated in residential care settings has increased by 85.7%; and 67% of children and young people looked after in a residential setting have a neurological diagnosis. This has significantly impacted on residential care budgets as costs are extremely high for each placement due to complexity of individual. Across the looked after children's population 17% have a significantly complex disability. The number of families eligible for an SDS budget has increased by 17% and overall referrals to the HSCP Children and Families Community Team have increased by 29%.

Criminal Justice pathways

82. The provision of unpaid work has been significantly impacted by the pandemic with Community Payback Orders suspended on 23rd March 2020. Legislation was introduced in March 2021 to reduce the number of hours originally imposed on Community Payback Orders (CPOs) by 35%. This excluded Community Payback Orders imposed for domestic abuse, sexual offending or stalking. This legislation reduced the backlog of hours by 2329 hours. The current outstanding backlog of hours for completion total 6,248.

83. In line with the increased throughput through the courts the justice service has seen a 44% increase in Diversion from Prosecution requests received from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) during April to September 2021. Requests for Criminal Justice Social Work Reports have also increased by 151% over this period compared to the same period last year.

Supporting people affected by domestic abuse

84. We have continued to provide support for women and families affected by domestic abuse throughout the pandemic. During the six month period 1st April to 30th September 2021 East Renfrewshire Women's Aid service reported a significant increase in referrals across their services compared to the same period last year. In total 645 women and children were supported compared to 447 during the same period last year with 33% of new referrals from partner agencies, the majority from social work (30%). This is a significant increase of 44% across the whole service and significant increase 63% in duty/helpline contacts.

85. Domestic Abuse continues to be the predominant reason for referral/concern reported to HSCP Children and Families Request for Assistance (RFA) Team. In the six month period April 2021 to September 2021 there were a total of 477 referrals received with domestic abuse listed as the primary concern in 99 referrals. This is 21% of the total RFA referrals received.

86. In line with trends across Scotland the East Renfrewshire Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) has witnessed an increase in referrals for high risk victims and children as the COVID restrictions have eased. In the period April 2021 to September 2021, 66 victims (63 female, 3 male) were discussed compared to 55 (53 female, 2 male) in the same period last year - an increase of 20%. 114 children were discussed at MARAC – 78 in the same period last year representing an increase of 46%.

87. It is expected that domestic abuse referrals will continue to increase longer-term and that there are significant challenges in ensuring our services have sufficient capacity to respond.

Corporate and Community Services Department

88. As is the case in other parts of the Council, the Corporate and Community Services Department is not back to business as usual in any sense. COVID related requirements combined with major line of business system changes to Council Tax and benefits, HR and Payroll and customer management systems during the last year while staff were working from home has taken considerable amount of staff resource and created backlogs. Priority is being given the working through these whilst continuing to meet the new and increasing demand coming in to services.

Communications

89. A high level of internal and external communications are COVID related and the team work to ensure that residents and staff are aware of all measures and precautions in place to tackle the pandemic.”

HR

90. Although the COVID absences trend overall has reduced since the last report in October, from the start of December increasing numbers are again being seen. In addition with the emergence of the Omicron variant it is expected that we will see further increased numbers of cases within our workforce. In preparation for this the team have updated manager guidance ensuring that there is clarity for managers on the measures that remain in place in our workplaces and we continue to work with managers on situations that arise and

remind staff of the importance of taking lateral flow tests and adhering to all hygiene measures.

91. The team are supporting a number of services where there are staffing concerns arising from COVID absence, sickness absences, natural turnover and vacancies. This is being managed using case management and recruitment. Recruitment volumes continue to remain high as a result of additional COVID funding and the timescales placed on the spending of these funds. There are also recruitment challenges in certain sectors where it is difficult to recruit due to market competitors and this can mean repeat recruitment advertising in many cases. As we move into the winter months and the risk of absences increasing further the team continue to work with services to understand the contingency plans that need to be considered.

Customer First

92. Customer contact remains high across all contact channels. Call handling rate and waiting times have improved compared to earlier in the year and at times they have returned to pre- COVID performance however this has not been sustained as there continues to be a high volume of calls related to the launch of any COVID Supports, which causes an increase in both face to face and telephone customer contact. There is also a high volume of calls related to Council Tax payments and taxi licensing application queries related to the delays caused by COVID. Customer First has been liaising with these teams to provide support where possible. Call times are taking longer with customers often contacting about multiple and more complex issues.

93. The registration service continues to be busy with an increase in the number of community deaths being registered. There was a 24% increase in death registrations in October compared to same time last year. Death registrations continue to be carried out remotely which takes longer and brings an increased level of administration compared to pre COVID.

94. MART continue to see an increase in Income Maximisation referrals and assist with a COVID Discretionary Grant.

Community Safety

95. The Community Wardens continue to operate normal working practices with staff being able to go into households when required, subject to COVID screening questions and windows being opened. Two members of the Community Warden team are still seconded to the isolation support calls team for assessments for support grants.

ICT

96. The ICT Service continues to operate a blended approach with continued high levels of support calls and service requests. If face to face support is required our users will be invited to attend the safe screened-off support area. The Service Desk team remains under significant pressure, especially the end-user device team who are facing combined pressures of increasing new device build and deployments, with increasing numbers of rebuilds and fixes to devices due to, for example, users devices are locked due to repeatedly forget passwords. The service is still unable to accommodate low priority service requests due to the current working conditions and service pressures.

Democratic Services

97. The team continue to adapt to the COVID restrictions to ensure appropriate measures are in place when engaging with Elected Members and the public and this included safe

delivery of the Remembrance Sunday event at Cowan Park. Preparations for next year's local government elections have commenced and planning needs to incorporate additional COVID measures. The upgrade work to accommodate hybrid meetings in the Council Chamber is scheduled for February 2022.

Isolation Support

98. Via Community Safety, the Council continues to provide an Isolation Support service for those asked to isolate by Public Health Scotland. This includes text messages to all who have consented to have their details passed to the Council and follow-up outbound phone calls to each household. The team also deals with inbound COVID queries via the National Assistance Helpline and this service will continue over the festive period as will the text messages, with more targeted outgoing calls where someone has indicated they are in need of isolation support. Under Scottish Government guidance, the isolation support service will now remain in place until at least the end of March 2022.

99. Self-Isolation Support Grants (SISG) are also continuing, with initial assessment and evidence gathering by the Isolation Support team and final assessment by the Benefits/Scottish Welfare Fund team. Guidance on SISGs has changed from 30 November 2021 to include eligibility for close contacts of the Omicron variant who are required to self-isolate regardless of their vaccination status or test result.

Pandemic Payments

100. The Council is currently administering winter Family Pandemic Payments to approximately 1600 children in receipt of Free School Meals (FSMs) as a result of low income. The base payment required is £160 per child and there will be quarterly payments of this type throughout 2022, with top-ups from the Education Department to cover cost of lunches during school holidays. On a one-off basis, the December 2021 payments will also be increased by a further £50, using Scottish Government humanitarian funding, bringing each of the December payments to a total of £235 per child. There also approximately a further 400 children who are in receipt of clothing grants only (not FSMs) and we are currently looking at the potential of a one-off hardship payment to those families in January, again using humanitarian funding.

Humanitarian Support Research & Funding

101. Humanitarian support research and engagement is continuing to inform the Council's approach to recovery and renewal. An update on this area was given to Cabinet in November 2021.

Chief Executive's

Accountancy Services

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

103. Due to the continuation of remote working, the external audit of the Council's 2020/21 accounts took longer than usual with the statutory deadline for accounts sign off being once again extended to 30 November rather than 30 September. The sign off of the Council's 2020/21 accounts was completed on 25 November 2021 in line with this new timescale.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Report Co-ordinator
Linda Hutchison, Senior Committee Services Officer (0141 577 8388)

BLANK PAGE