
Report To:	Inverclyde Council	Date:	22 April 2021
Report By:	Interim Service Director Environment and Economic Recovery	Report No:	IC/04/21/MM
Contact Officer:	Martin McNab	Contact No:	01475 714246
Subject:	COVID-19 Update		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Council on actions taken to mitigate the risks around the Covid-19 outbreak.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report updates members on a number of specific areas of work in addressing the Covid-19 pandemic including the vaccination strategy. It does not cover all service related issues, for example education delivery, as the majority of these will be reported through the appropriate service committee. Action logs for decisions made on service delivery will also be reported through the appropriate service committees.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That members note the actions taken to date to mitigate the effects of the Covid-19 outbreak in Inverclyde.

Martin McNab
Head of Public Protection & Covid Recovery

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Since the last update to Council on 18th February the overall rate in Inverclyde has continued to decline. At the time of writing the rate stands at 18 cases per 100K. This compares favourably with the Scottish rate of 34.3 and the average GGC rate of 49. Although it is obviously good to see the Inverclyde rate comparing favourably the latter two rates are in many ways more important as we look to emerge from lockdown as they represent the risk to Inverclyde from cases from elsewhere in Scotland.
- 4.2 The vaccination programme has continued with some blips caused by vaccine supply issues since the last update. At the time of writing 63% of the Inverclyde adult population had received a first dose and 15.6% had received a second dose. This compared with Scotland and GGC rates of 59.1% and 54.2% for first dose and 13.3% and 12.7% for second dose.

5.0 ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE

- 5.1 The decline in infection numbers together with the progress in vaccination has led to a reduction in the frequency of the Council's Corporate Resilience Management Team (CRMT) and the HSCP's Local Resilience Management Team (LRMT) meetings to fortnightly at the time of writing although both groups are able to step up this frequency as the need arises.
- 5.2 The GGC Health Board wide resilience partnership meetings have also reduced in their frequency and are now being held on an "as required" basis. Specific regular meetings on operational matters relating to the pandemic including Environmental Health, community testing and the vaccination rollout continue to be held with colleagues from GGC and constituent local authorities. In addition the Chief Executives of the six local authorities and the Health Board also continue to meet regularly.

6.0 WORKFORCE ISSUES

- 6.1 The decline in the rate of infection since the February update has obviously reduced the pressure on services. Regular workforce statistics continue to be produced for meetings of the Council and the Policy & Resources Committee.
- 6.2 The table below provides approximate absence levels council wide and within some of our key essential service areas, as at 12 April 2021:

<u>Council</u>	
Historic average absence rate (%) (Pre Covid-19 to give a baseline comparator)	4.3%
Absence rate on 12 April 2021 (%) (This includes all those employees reporting sick, those isolating, those absent with caring responsibilities and those shielding at home unable to work from home). Please note that this excludes employees working from home.	<p>Council Wide 6.0%</p> <p><u>Essential Services Breakdown (% of Service Area)</u></p> <p>Home Care 7.1 %</p> <p>Other HSCP 3.0%</p> <p>Waste Management 8.7%</p> <p>Facilities 7.2%</p>

- 6.3 The table below provides a comparison of absence levels across the Council over the past few months as reported to the Policy & Resources Exec Sub-Committee, the Policy & Resources Committee and the Council (the breakdown of absence levels amongst essential services is not available for the 1st and 14th April 2020 dates):

	28.4.20	12.5.20	26.5.20	9.6.20	16.7.20	5.8.20	9.9.20	17.11.20	19.1.21	5.2.21	12.3.21	12.04.21
Council	18.5%	17.5%	17.6%	16.9%	7.5%	7.5%	7.7%	6.1%	7.6%	6.6%	6.4%	6.0%
Home Care	27.3%	19.2%	20.2%	18.5%	7.8%	8.0%	7.9%	5.0%	12.0%	11.2%	8.7%	7.1%
Other HSCP	21.87%	14.2%	17.3%	11.22%	6.3%	6.1%	6.2%	4.2%	3.6%	3.9%	3.7%	3.0%
Waste Mgt	29.5%	24.3%	24.0%	23.9%	9%	8.9%	8.6%	8.0%	9.5%	10.7%	8.9%	8.7%
Facilities	23.0%	26.1%	22.2%	14.6%	4.5%	4.6%	5.1%	4.6%	8.0%	5.9%	7.2%	7.2%

7.0 SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES

7.1 The Council continues to administer a number of funding streams for business grants on behalf of the Scottish Government. Teams within the Finance Service and the Regeneration and Planning Service have processes in place to release the support timeously whilst robust governance checks are in place to ensure that only valid payments are made.

Business grant support payments made by the Council in 2020/21 now exceed £18 million with an estimate that this will exceed £21 million by the end of April. This funding is over and above Non-Domestic Rates relief in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

A number of significant schemes are now closed with final appeals/reviews taking place. The position of these is as follows:

Strategic Framework Closure and Hardship - £3.049million to 438 Businesses

Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Top Up Grants - £2.513million to 381 Businesses

Taxi Drivers fund – £567,000 paid to 378 taxi and private hire drivers

The Council has now disbursed £899,500 in the Discretionary Fund and a Restart Grant to a sub-set of the Strategic Framework Grant recipients was due to be paid on 19 April at a cost of over £3million.

8.0 VACCINATION STRATEGY

8.1 Vaccination of residents in care homes was completed by the HSCP in March. Vaccination of new care home residents continues as necessary and second vaccinations for residents in adult care homes will be undertaken at the beginning of May. Second doses have started for the over 80s and over 75s by GP practices and the HSCP as per vaccination supply.

8.2 By the time of the April Council meeting all of the 9 JCVI at risk groups will have been offered a first dose of vaccine. The further rollout to the general population between the ages of 16 and 50 should have commenced albeit the pace of the rollout to these groups will depend largely on vaccine supply. As indicated in 8.1 above however the rollout of second doses will continue to all groups in the JCVI priority list in the original order.

9.0 TESTING

9.1 The drive through testing facility at Parklea continues to operate every second day in tandem with the Crawfurdsburn walk in facility. It is undoubtedly the case that the testing capacity available was extremely helpful in the initial phase of the current pandemic wave. Access to testing is essential to allow positive cases to be identified and limit the spread from undiagnosed cases and asymptomatic contacts. There is at this stage no intention to reduce the availability of PCR testing in Inverclyde with Crawfurdsburn set to continue for a further 6 months.

9.2 Asymptomatic testing has been available in Inverclyde, initially at the Gamble Halls and more recently in Boglestone Community Centre. It is intended that this should continue for the foreseeable future with the expectation that we will scale it up should the need arise.

10.0 HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

- 10.1 The lockdown at the end of 2020 brought about a significant increase in call traffic to the three helplines currently manned by Public Protection staff. These are the original “shielding” helpline, which continues to be highlighted in letters to shielders; the national assistance helpline, which redirects callers from a national number to the Council and; the local helpline which is available to all Inverclyde residents requiring help and support. Inbound calls from those requested to self-isolate are also channelled through the national helpline number. All of the phone lines are directed to the same small team and appropriate support is offered regardless of the original channel. With the increase in calls monitoring of the lines was increased to seven days with messages left on the system out of hours followed up the next morning. The number of calls has gradually decreased since the early January peak and a number of “regular” callers have been referred to the HSCP to see if more appropriate support can be offered.
- 10.2 Consideration is also being given through the recovery planning process to continuation of the Inverclyde helpline for the duration of 2021-22. Obviously the level of cover will depend on the state of the pandemic but it is likely that there will be ongoing need for this service for at least the rest of the year.
- 10.3 The number of people receiving outbound calls from Public Protection as part of the Isolate & Support work stream has obviously also decreased dramatically in line with the decrease in the level of infection. It is likely that these calls, albeit hopefully at a very low level, will continue for the foreseeable future.

11.0 REGULATION

- 11.1 The Environmental Health & Trading Standards teams in Public Protection continue to carry out advisory & enforcement visits to businesses to ensure compliance with the current Coronavirus regulations. These include following up complaints from the public and employees in businesses and engaging with Police Scotland, the Health & Safety Executive and other agencies where powers under the regulations or other legislation lie with those bodies. Most recently advisory visits have been made to all hairdressers and barbers as these have opened up again. The teams are currently also giving advice to non-essential retail and hospitality which will reopen on 26th April. Unannounced visits of businesses will take place from 26th April to ensure that suitable measures to reduce the risk of transmission are in place.

12.0 ECONOMIC CASE FOR ADDITIONAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORT POST COVID

- 12.1 Members will be aware that funding was allocated by the Policy and Resources Committee on the 15th September 2020 to facilitate the commissioning of consultants to prepare an economic case to present to the Scottish and UK Governments for special support post Covid. Discussions have taken place with West Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Councils regarding a joint commissioning as all three areas have significant issues in common affecting their areas with depopulation and economic decline being significant challenges. To assist with the research required, the City Region’s Intelligence Hub has undertaken a socio economics challenges review facing three Council areas and the Fraser of Allander Institute is being commissioned to review this work and will undertake the following:
- Desk-based research to examine “what works” in countries across the world from the literature, focussing on population decline, economic recovery in areas requiring regeneration and dealing with Inequality and poverty
 - Identify a handful of similar local authorities across the UK for each council and examine a number of dimensions, including: Population history and outlook; Rurality; Coastal location; Industrial history and mix; Wages; Productivity; and, measures of income deprivation
 - Undertake a set of qualitative interviews with the economic development functions and/or LEPs in these areas to explore:
 - Policy initiatives that have been tried/ been successful in recent years to arrest population or household decline, stimulate economic regeneration, and/or reduce poverty and inequality;
 - Plans for supporting economic recovery post-COVID.

- Finally, this would result in a discussion for each main challenge facing these areas, divided into:
 - Economic recovery from COVID
 - Economic growth & Regeneration
 - The Population Challenge
 - Inequality and poverty

The Consultants would cover the policies used and tried in the “sister” LAs identified, and also how policy initiatives can support Scotland or UK wide strategies (including the opportunities for investment) such as the Inward Investment Strategy, the Digital Strategy and Levelling up.

Once the study is completed the report will be presented to Members in due course.

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13.0 STREAMING OF FUNERALS

13.1 Officers are currently engaged in a tender process to deliver an enhanced and long term service for streaming funerals. As previously reported some elements may require to be delivered in conjunction with the more major works planned for the crematorium.

14.0 CRUISE SHIP VISITS SCHEDULED 2021

14.1 Since the February meeting officers from Public Protection have met with Clydeport to discuss a possible return of cruise calls to the Ocean Terminal. What can and cannot occur is largely in the hands of the UK Government as this is a reserved area of policy led by the Department of Transport. What we can be certain off at this stage however is that any return of cruise calls is likely to be in gradual stages beginning with “staycations” on vessels with no organised trips or leaving the vessel through to a gradual return to organised trips. Vessels will be operating at greatly reduced capacity to facilitate social distancing as a result of which it is likely that cruising this year will be limited to only the largest vessels. It is also hard to envisage a return to ad hoc shore visits by either passengers or crew this year.

15.0 SERVICE CHANGES

- 15.1 All six public libraries in Inverclyde re-opened for 'Connect and Collect' and PC use on 6 April 2021. Opening hours and days vary by branch. Library users can book either or both of these services in advance by calling their local library or emailing library.central@inverclyde.gov.uk. It is not yet possible to 'drop in' to the library without a 'Connect and Collect' or PC booking, but this will be re-introduced as Government guidance allows. In addition, the library service is still running 'Books on Wheels'. Prior to Covid, this service was for housebound library users; as a response to the pandemic this has been extended to include all over 75s and those shielding. Deliveries are monthly and booked in advance by calling the library or contacting the email address above. All additional library activities and events will continue to take place online until further notice.
- 15.2 The Watt Institution will re-open to the public on Wed 28 April 2021; opening hours will be Wed-Sat 10am-2pm in the first instance. The museum and art gallery will be open on a drop-in basis (although it may be required to restrict numbers in the building at any one time), and the Watt Library will be open by prior appointment only. Library users can book an appointment by calling the Watt Institution or emailing wattinstitution@inverclyde.gov.uk. The Watt's exhibitions programme will re-start in 2021, with "Greenock and the Sea", guest curated by Dr Emma Bond of St Andrews University, opening soon, and one or two other shows planned for later in the year.
- 15.3 Members will be aware that a number of public conveniences have been closed or operating at reduced hours. It is intended that the public conveniences at Shore Street, Gourrock, Hunter's Place and Kilblain Street will reopen by the 26th April. The latter two will continue to have the limited opening hours instituted in 2019 to combat anti-social behaviour i.e. closing at 5 p.m. Other toilets will be opening from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Officers are additionally taking steps to facilitate the reopening on a more sustained basis of the Lunderston Bay and Greenock Cut Centre toilets.

16.0 EVENTS – 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GREENOCK BLITZ

- 16.1 Due to ongoing Covid restrictions on events and gatherings a significantly reduced occasion to mark the significant 80th anniversary of the Greenock Blitz will take place on Friday 7 May 2021. The provost, or his representative, will be asked to lay a wreath at the Greenock cemetery in line with Covid restrictions and physical distancing and the Chief Executive, as Returning Officer at the count centre for the Scottish parliament elections being held that day in Greenock, will lead a Local Minute's Silence to mark this significant occasion in the areas history.

17.0 IMPLICATIONS

17.1 Finance

None

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report £000	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/(savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With effect from	Annual net impact £000	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

17.2 Legal

None

17.3 Human Resources

None

17.4 Equalities

(a) Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES (see attached appendix)
X	NO - This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

If this report affects or proposes any major strategic decision:-

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
X	NO

(c) Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.
X	NO

17.5 Repopulation

There are no impacts on repopulation arising from this report.

18.0 CONSULTATIONS

18.1 The Corporate Management Team has been consulted on this report.

19.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

19.1 None