
Report To:	Policy & Resources Committee	Date:	25 May 2021
Report By:	Interim Service Director Environment and Economic Recovery	Report No:	PR/07/21/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 Committee on actions taken to mitigate the risks around the Covid-19 outbreak and to report on items requiring Committee approval or scrutiny under the expedited procedures.

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. There have been no Policy & Resources action log entries since the last committee meeting.
- 2.2 Sections 10-13 of the report cover items which require to be reported to committee under the expedited procedures. Section 10 covers the process for applications to the Community Renewal Fund. Section 11 covers a proposed change to the Pensions Discretion Policy around Additional Voluntary Contributions. Section 12 is an update on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Section 13 updates on progress on the Inverclyde Jobs Recovery Plan.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That members note the actions taken to date to mitigate the effects of the Covid-19 outbreak in Inverclyde.
- 3.2 It is recommended that the Committee notes the update on the Community Renewal Fund process and also notes that the approval process prior to submission may be by the use of the emergency powers process.
- 3.3 It is recommended that the committee approves an amendment to the Council's Pensions Discretions Policy to apply the available discretion to introduce a Salary Sacrifice Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contributions scheme.
- 3.4 It is recommended that the Committee notes the update on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- 3.5 It is recommended that the Committee notes the progress on the Inverclyde Jobs Recovery Plan.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Since the last update to the Committee in March the overall rate in Inverclyde has continued to decline. At the time of writing the rate stands at 6.5 cases per 100K. This compares favourably with the Scottish rate of 18 and the average GGC rate of 23. 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. From this perspective it is good to see the Renfrewshire rate dropping to 9.5 cases per 100k and the Glasgow rate to 29.
- 4.2 The vaccination programme has continued with the main focus being on delivering second doses to the JCVI priority groups although this is being done in tandem with the roll out of first doses to the under 50s. At the time of writing 68% of the Inverclyde adult population had received a first dose and 32% had received a second dose. This compared with Scotland and GGC rates of 63% and 60% for first dose and 31% and 27% 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. The former continues to meet fortnightly however the latter has reduced its frequency to once every 6 weeks albeit both retain the flexibility to meet at short notice should the circumstances require this.
- 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 7th May 2021:

<u>Council</u>	
Historic average absence rate (%) (Pre Covid-19 to give a baseline comparator)	4.3%
Absence rate on 07 May 2021 (%) (This includes all those employees reporting sick, those isolating, those absent with caring responsibilities and shielding at home unable to work from home). Please note that this excludes employees working from home.	<p>Council Wide 5.2%</p> <p><u>Essential Services Breakdown (% of Service Area)</u></p> <p>Home Care 6.7%</p> <p>Other HSCP 2.5%</p> <p>Waste Management 7.9%</p> <p>Facilities 3.1%</p>

- 6.3 The table below provides a comparison of absence levels across the Council over the past year which have been reported to this Committee:

	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	07.05.21
Council	17.5%	17.6%	16.9%	7.5%	7.5%	7.7%	6.1%	7.6%	6.6%	6.4%	6.0%	5.2%
Home Care	19.2%	20.2%	18.5%	7.8%	8.0%	7.9%	5.0%	12.0%	11.2%	8.7%	7.1%	6.7%
Other HSCP	14.2%	17.3%	11.22%	6.3%	6.1%	6.2%	4.2%	3.6%	3.9%	3.7%	3.0%	2.5%
Waste Mgt	24.3%	24.0%	23.9%	9%	8.9%	8.6%	8.0%	9.5%	10.7%	8.9%	8.7%	7.9%
Facilities	26.1%	22.2%	14.6%	4.5%	4.6%	5.1%	4.6%	8.0%	5.9%	7.2%	7.2%	3.1%

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 exceeded £18 million with an estimate that this will exceed £23 million once the current schemes are closed. 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 - £3.082million to 437 Businesses
 Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Top Up Grants - £2.525million to 394 Businesses
 Taxi Drivers fund – £567,000 paid to 378 taxi and private hire drivers
 Restart Grants- £3.635million paid to 428 Businesses

The Council has now disbursed £1.025million in the Discretionary Fund.

Support for Taxi Operator Licence Holders was agreed using Emergency Powers. Support was agreed at £1120/Licence Holder funded from the Covid Discretionary Grants Budget. The total cost of the support is estimated to be £325,000.

8.0 VACCINATION STRATEGY

8.1 The delivery of second dose vaccinations by the HSCP and GP practices to the highest risk JCVI cohorts, namely care home residents, the over 80s, over 75s and clinically extremely vulnerable will be largely complete by the time of the Committee. Second doses should also have been offered to all Health and Social Care staff by the time of the meeting. The HSCP will continue to vaccinate during the summer as housebound younger groups and new residents to care homes receive 1st and 2nd doses.

8.2 The roll out of second doses to the other JCVI priority groups continues through the mass vaccination sites at Port Glasgow and Greenock town halls in tandem with the rollout of first doses to the general population between the ages of 16 and 49. Uncertainty over vaccine supply has led to a focus on the former over the latter however the Health Board remains confident that the target of offering a first dose to all adults by the end of July remains on track. It should also be noted that planning is ongoing over the potential need for booster vaccinations later in the year and indeed how this might be delivered if there is deemed to be a requirement to deliver these annually.

9.0 TESTING

9.1 The drive through testing facility at Parklea continues to operate every second day in tandem with the Crawfordsburn 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. By the time of the Committee meeting the Boglestone site should also be able to offer home testing kits under the Government's universal offer.

10.0 COMMUNITY RENEWAL FUND

- 10.1 The UK Community Renewal Fund is £220million of investment for 2021-22. The fund aims to help support local areas pilot new approaches and programmes aligning national and local provision. It aims to support people and communities most in need across the UK and also prepare them to take advantage of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund when it launches in 2022. Inverclyde is considered 1 of 100 areas of most need and is therefore defined as a Priority Place for the fund.
- 10.2 The UK Government has identified 4 investment priorities for the fund: investment in skills; investment for local businesses; investment in communities and place; and, supporting people into employment. Net zero is also a priority for the fund. The fund is predominately revenue (90% revenue/10% capital). Successful bids will be for 2021/2022 only and should be scaled accordingly to ensure that interventions are financially completed by 31st of March 2022.
- 10.3 Inverclyde Council is the Lead Authority for Inverclyde. The Council is inviting applications to be submitted by noon on the 4th of June. The Council will then assess and submit successful bids to the UK Government on the 18th of June. Members will appreciate that the timings for the process are extremely tight therefore approval for the bids to be submitted may require the emergency powers procedure to be used. This will be done in the most The UK Government has indicated that they will let applicants know in late 2021.

11.0 SALARY SACRIFICE SHARED COST ADDITIONAL VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTION SCHEME – CHANGE TO PENSIONS DISCRETIONS POLICY

- 11.1 Inverclyde Council employees who are members of the Local Government Pension Scheme already have the option of paying additional voluntary contributions (AVCs) and receive tax relief on the amount they pay via their salary. There is now an option to introduce a shared cost scheme for members of the LGPS, which offers the additional benefit (compared to the current arrangement) of reducing national insurance contributions for both the employee and the Council.
- 11.2 The cost of introducing, implementing, and administering a scheme through the services of a financial partner would be met from total employer NIC and apprenticeship levy savings of currently 14.3% of the salary sacrificed, leaving the Council with a net saving. If around 90% of the current AVC members (61) transfer to a salary sacrifice shared cost AVC arrangement, the Council can expect to achieve annual savings of around £27,940.77.
- 11.3 The employee currently receives tax relief on the amount they pay via their salary. The additional benefit from Shared Cost Scheme for the employee is reduced national insurance contributions. An example calculation is undernoted:

An example of the difference to the employee in a Share Cost and in Standard AVC Scheme is (next page):

Employee Salary:£30,000, Regular AVC: £250 per four weeks (£3,250 each year)

	Without AVC	With Standard AVC	With Shared Cost AVC
Gross four weekly pay (before main scheme contributions)	£2,500	£2,500	£2,251
Employees LGPS contribution	£152.50	£152.50	£152.50
Employee's AVC contribution	£0	£250	£1
Employer AVC contribution	£0	£0	£249
Total AVC contribution	£0	£250	£250
Employees Income Tax	£278.18	£225.68	£225.68
Employee's National Insurance	£211.68	£211.68	£181.80
Employee's four weekly pay after tax	£1,857.64	£1,660.14	£1,690.02

The Council's current Pensions Discretions Policy indicates that the Council has previously elected not to set up a shared cost AVC Scheme. In order to explore further and implement the benefits of a Salary Sacrifice Shared Cost AVC Scheme, approval is sought from the Committee to amend the Council's current discretions policy.

12.0 HEALTH & WELLBEING STRATEGY

12.1 Health & Wellbeing is a key part of our OD Strategy 2020 – 23. The annual update report on the progress of the OD strategy has been developed taking account of the impact of the Covid pandemic which has had a significant impact on how the council delivers its services, its priorities and working practices particularly in relation to health & wellbeing, communication with the workforce and flexible working.

The link to the OD Update report can be found at <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/jobs-and-careers/working-for-the-council/people-and-organisational-development-strategy>

12.2 The Council conducted Employee Health and Wellbeing Surveys in July 2020 to consult with our staff on how the Covid Pandemic was affecting them. We recognised that the ask of the Council and its employees had never been greater, and we wanted to understand how staff were feeling, and what could be improved to enable them to work effectively, stay safe and maintain their wellbeing. Our surveys and a survey undertaken nationally by the trade unions highlighted mental health issues and stress levels higher than normal. Our survey reassuringly indicated a large majority knew who to contact or where to access resources regarding their health and wellbeing and felt supported by the Council during this period; We are working with Unison to obtain the national union survey results for the Inverclyde area and these will be analysed and any actions coming from this will be incorporated in the Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

12.3 It was felt that further support was needed and OD, Policy & Communications developed a local and sustainable health & wellbeing strategy and plan, to build on the existing work done around wellbeing

and resilience for the workforce nationally and locally , and to tie in with our overall Covid -19 recovery plan. The 3 Pillars of the strategy are: Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing; Physical Wellbeing and Financial Wellbeing.

The Health & Wellbeing Strategy and the Plan are attached at <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/jobs-and-careers/working-for-the-council/health-and-wellbeing-strategy>

12.4 At the time of writing it is proposed to introduce the strategy during Mental Health Week on 10 May 2021 and on the same day tie in a virtual Healthy Working Lives series of events to the launch of the strategy and plan. A new Mentally Healthy Workplaces course for managers and Mental Health Improvement and Suicide Prevention Course for employees will be launched on 10 May 2021 and a training event for managers is being arranged for 11 May 2021 to discuss culture towards Mental Health in the workplace and for managers to improve the wellbeing of their staff. As the launch will have occurred by the time of Committee a verbal update will be given on progress.

13.0 INVERCLYDE JOBS RECOVERY PLAN

13.1 A campaign has been launched using the theme ‘Inverclyde works’ to raise the profile of job vacancies, training and other employability initiatives to the broadest possible audiences to encourage more people into employment and training in order to support community recovery. Job vacancies, which have arisen as part of the Council’s workforce refresh programme, have been advertised locally and shared with local employability partners such as: Skills Development Scotland, Inverclyde Community Development Trust, and the local Department of Work and Pensions, to allow for a wide reach of council vacancies to the Inverclyde population. Further updates will be provided during the lifespan of the project.

14.0 IMPLICATIONS

14.1 Finance

Financial matters are the subject of a separate report from the Chief Financial Officer.

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					

Legal

14.2 None

Human Resources

14.3 The Head of Organisational Development, Human Resources and Communications has been consulted on the contents of this report.

14.4 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

Repopulation

14.5 There are no impacts on repopulation arising from this report.

15.0 CONSULTATIONS

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

16.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

16.1 None