
Report To:	Policy & Resources Committee	Date:	10 Aug 2021
Report By:	Interim Service Director, Environment and Economic Recovery	Report No:	PR/13/21/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. There have been no Policy & Resources action log entries since the last committee meeting and the use of action logs has now been discontinued.
- 2.2 Section 5 of the report covers workforce issues including a recommendation on staff flu vaccination, Section 6 updates on vaccination, Section 7 on testing, Sections 8, 9 and 10 update on the Economic Study, the £130 payment to Council Tax reduction recipients and changes to the Scottish Welfare Fund criteria. Section 11 covers the opening of the Battery Park Toilets and Section 12 updates on proposals for events funded by the recovery fund.

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 That the committee approves the use of £15k from the Covid Recovery Fund to finance flu vaccinations for staff not otherwise covered by the NHS programme.
- 3.3 That committee note the successful outcome of the bid to the RSPBA and agree the proposals for events contained in the report as part of the approved recovery funds for Meliora events.

Martin McNab
Interim Head of Public Protection & Covid Recovery

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Since the last update to the Committee in May Inverclyde, together with the rest of GGC and indeed the rest of Scotland has endured a third wave of Covid 19 driven by the introduction of the Delta variant which quickly became the predominant variant in Scotland and the UK. Cases in Inverclyde peaked at a rate of just over 500 cases per 100k per week. At the time of writing this report case numbers had declined to the level of 200 cases per 100k per week but had stalled at that level leaving Inverclyde with the highest rate in Scotland. There is no obvious reason for this with almost all cases being as a result of small household outbreaks. It should be noted that there have been significant numbers of calls to those required to self-isolate in recent weeks and finance have dealt with a 600% increase in self-isolation support grant applications. A verbal update will be given to the committee on the situation at that time.
- 4.2 The vaccination programme has continued with the focus shifting from the JCVI priority groups to younger age groups. By late July all over 18s would have been offered a first vaccination appointment. Unfortunately we have seen the same drop off in uptake numbers as we go down the age groups in Inverclyde as has been the case across the UK. We continue to work with the Health Board on ways to increase these and from late July onwards all clinics are accepting “drop in” appointments. The Council, Health Board and HSCP have also been planning for autumn flu-vaccinations and a possible Covid booster programme and an all members briefing will be held on this in due course.

5.0 WORKFORCE ISSUES

- 5.1 The issues in terms of workforce availability and confidence are crucial. Officers from Organisational Development, Policy & Communications are in contact with COSLA colleagues relative to workforce statistics, illness/absence rates, working from home, etc. This information is being collated at a national level and is helping to inform discussions between senior leaders in SOLACE, COSLA and the Scottish Government regarding the impact of COVID-19 on service provision, and the key staffing issues that require some form of national consideration.

5.2 Employee attendance

Information is being gathered on a daily basis by managers across the Council. This allows managers to assess resource implications for delivering essential services and also to maintain contact and support those unable to attend work.

- 5.3 The table below provides approximate absence levels council wide and within some of our key essential service areas, as at 23rd July 2021:

<u>Council</u>													
Historic average absence rate (%) (Pre Covid-19 to give a baseline comparator)	4.3%												
Absence rate on 23 July 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.	<table> <tr> <td>Council Wide</td> <td>5.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"><u>Essential Services Breakdown (% of Service Area)</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Home Care</td> <td>7.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other HSCP</td> <td>3.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Waste Management</td> <td>6.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Facilities</td> <td>3.0%</td> </tr> </table>	Council Wide	5.6%	<u>Essential Services Breakdown (% of Service Area)</u>		Home Care	7.1%	Other HSCP	3.5%	Waste Management	6.8%	Facilities	3.0%
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- 5.4 The table below provides a comparison of absence levels across the Council over the past year which have been reported to this Committee:

	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	02.06.21	23.07.21
Council	17.6%	16.9%	7.5%	7.5%	7.7%	6.1%	7.6%	6.6%	6.4%	6.0%	5.2%	5.0%	5.6%
Home Care	20.2%	18.5%	7.8%	8.0%	7.9%	5.0%	12.0%	11.2%	8.7%	7.1%	6.7%	5.4%	7.1%

Other HSCP	17.3%	11.22%	6.3%	6.1%	6.2%	4.2%	3.6%	3.9%	3.7%	3.0%	2.5%	2.5%	3.5%
Waste Mgt	24.0%	23.9%	9%	8.9%	8.6%	8.0%	9.5%	10.7%	8.9%	8.7%	7.9%	5.9%	6.8%
Facilities	22.2%	14.6%	4.5%	4.6%	5.1%	4.6%	8.0%	5.9%	7.2%	7.2%	3.1%	3.2%	3.0%

5.5 Members may recall proposals in 2020 to extend the flu vaccination coverage to all Council staff via a voucher scheme. In the event this did not take place owing to constraints around vaccine supply. The trade unions have however asked the Council to consider offering a similar scheme in 2021. As there may be a greater impact from any circulating flu given the low levels last winter this would increase the resilience of the workforce going into winter. Initial priority would be given to frontline services. The corporate management team has considered this issue and recommends the use of up to £15k from the Covid Recovery Fund to allow up to 1000 vaccinations for staff outwith the NHS vaccination programme. Delivery of vaccinations to these staff will only take place if there is sufficient vaccine available.

6.0 VACCINATION STRATEGY

6.1 Questions have been raised previously by members regarding media reports of low vaccine uptake amongst social care staff. Overall 87% of staff working in care homes have received a 1st vaccination and 81% a second vaccination. This is broken down as care homes for older people: 1st dose 89%, 2nd dose 85% and care homes for adults: 1st dose 77% and 2nd dose 63%.

Vaccinations were available to all care home staff from December to May through a combination of on-site vaccination and dedicated staff clinics across NHSGGC including at IRH. The last of these clinics in Inverclyde was in mid-May offering 700 appointments over 2 days. All of these staff will also now have been offered a vaccination as part of Scotland's public vaccination programme with an invite to a Town Hall or they may access one of the many drop in sessions being offered each week at the 2 town hall venues. As these options are available to everyone at present there is no ongoing dedicated staff programme being delivered by NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde.

The HSCP proactively engage with care home managers through a weekly meeting with vaccinations being on the agenda and all dates for drop in sessions are regularly circulated to them by the HSCP. Some local providers are engaging with their staff to find out the reasons for not taking up the vaccine. One provider has advised they have an app where staff are asked to record when they have received and there may be an element of under reporting due to this. Vaccination is not mandatory and staff can choose to receive the vaccine or not, when on site HSCP vaccinators ensured they were available for any staff with concerns to have a discussion and answer questions in order to encourage uptake. Where there have been specific concerns or issues raised with us regarding individuals being able to access an appointment these have been dealt with by Health & Community Care. The HSCP will continue to engage with providers to support staff to be vaccinated where they so wish through the channels currently available.

6.2 The vaccination programme has continued with the focus shifting from the JCVI priority groups to younger age groups. By late July all over 18s would have been offered a first vaccination appointment. Unfortunately we have seen the same drop off in uptake numbers as we go down the age groups in Inverclyde as has been the case across the UK. We continue to work with the Health Board on ways to increase these and from late July onwards all clinics are accepting "drop in" appointments. The Council, Health Board and HSCP have also been planning for autumn flu-vaccinations and a possible Covid booster programme and an all members briefing will be held on this in due course. At the time of writing this report 75.6% of the population of Inverclyde aged 18 and above had received two doses of the vaccine.

7.0 TESTING

7.1 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 until at least the end of September.

- 7.2 The asymptomatic testing offer in Inverclyde continues to be centred on Boglestone Community Centre. Kits for testing at home are now also available at the majority of community pharmacies in Inverclyde as well as from Boglestone and Crawfurdsburn.

8.0 ECONOMIC STUDY

- 8.1 Committee previously set aside £60,000 to commission an economic study into the impact of Covid, continued depopulation and deprivation on the economy and ways this could be addressed. Two neighbouring Councils which share the same issues to a greater or lesser degree agreed to be part of the same study and the Fraser of Allander Institute have been commissioned to carry out the study following approval via Emergency Powers by the Convener, Vice-Convener and Councillor Robertson. The estimated cost being under £15k per Council.

9.0 £130 PAYMENT TO COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION RECIPIENTS

- 9.1 The Scottish Government announced a £130 low income pandemic payment to all Council Tax Reduction recipients plus some other groups exempt from paying Council Tax. The payments are to be administered by the Council who will be fully reimbursed for the payments plus an administration charge. As at 28.7.21 just over 6000 payments / credits have been made and reminders are being sent to the almost 4000 potential recipients who have not yet applied.

10.0 CHANGES TO SCOTTISH WELFARE FUND AWARD CRITERIA

- 10.1 In August 2020 the Committee agreed to reduce the priority categorisation for Community Care grants from High to Medium. This extra support was funded by one off Covid related grant from the Scottish Government. Based on spend levels the Council requires to return to the High priority criteria in order to avoid an overspend in 2021/22.
- 10.2 At the start of the pandemic the Council increased the Crisis Grant award by 20%. This has proven to be a welcome and effective decision and it is proposed that this change is maintained for the remainder of the financial year.

11.0 OPENING OF BATTERY PARK TOILETS

- 11.1 Members will be aware that the opening of the Battery Park toilets has historically been linked to pitch bookings as the facility required to be manned as access to the toilets required the whole pavilion to be open and manned. This issue has been resolved and the toilets can now be open as a stand-alone facility. Having the toilets open seven days a week however obviously requires additional cleaning resources. These are being covered through activities in the park for the Summer of Fun until the end of August.
- 11.2 It is proposed that the toilets remain open until the end of March 2022 with the funding for the additional cleaning required being contained within the funding allocated for Lunderston Bay and the Greenock Cut Centre following a review of cleaning requirements, the situation will be kept under review. Officers will bring forward a review of public convenience provision across Inverclyde from April 2022 as part of the 2022 budget process.

12.0 RECOVERY PLANS UPDATE

- 12.1 The council approved funding to support the delivery of major events in 2022 and officers have been exploring opportunities to deliver major events under the Meliora theme and three events have been developed:
- British Pipe Band Championships
 - Illumination event and performance (in partnership with the Beacon Arts Centre)
 - Inverclyde outdoor obstacle course event (in partnership with Inverclyde Leisure)

- 12.2 Following a request from Councillor Rebecchi at the Council's Policy and Resources Committee on 25 May 2021 officers have held discussions with the Chief Executive of the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Championships (RSPBA) which highlighted the opportunity to host the British Pipe Band Championships in 2022.

As part of the areas recovery events a bid was submitted to the RSPBA to host the event in Inverclyde at Battery Park in 2022 and that bid has been successful.

Currently the event is scheduled for Saturday 21 May 2022 and officers will agree the final details of how the event dovetails with the existing Gourock Highland Games held in May to support community recovery through the delivery of outdoor events and to maximise the promotion of Inverclyde as a visitor location.

- 12.3 In addition to this a partnership with the Beacon Arts Centre will develop plans to deliver a multi-media illumination and performance event in June as part of the wider Meliora festival.

The event would be based around the custom house, docks and waterfront area at the Beacon Arts Centre incorporating an exciting multi-media lighting festival, outdoor and indoor performances and cultural activity.

- 12.4 In partnership with Inverclyde Leisure a new Inverclyde outdoor obstacle course event is being planned for June 2022 at Battery Park.

The Battery Park space will be transformed into a large special outdoor obstacle course with functional training space to encourage physical activity and exercise and the obstacle course will consist of 25 obstacles including: Flying Monkey Bars, Adjustable Walls for all ages, A frame ladder, Ninja Walls, Crawl and Cargo Nets, Balance boards, walking Beams, Ropes, Climbing frames and Carry Tyres Individuals and teams taking part will be encouraged to take part to raise funds for charity with the nominated charity The Inverclyde Community Fund operated by CVS Inverclyde.

The event would be run over two days with day 1 being a free event for Inverclyde school children and day 2 being an individual and team event

- 12.5 The timing of events for the Meliora Festival will be in May and June 2022 with the Gourock Games and British Pipe Band Champions held in May 2022 and the sports event in partnership with Inverclyde Leisure and the multi-media and performance event in Partnership with the Beacon Arts Centre both held in June 2022.

A small working group has been established to plan the delivery of events and to provide effective links to other areas of recovery event planning including locality events and town and village centre events and the plans for commemorating the HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June 2022 when full details are published.

13.0 IMPLICATIONS

13.1 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
Covid Recovery Fund	-	2021-22	15		Staff vaccination programme

Covid Recovery Fund	-	2021-22	350 (already allocated)		<p>Spend against events: £173K (British Pipe Band Championships) £87K (Outdoor obstacle course event) £90K (Multimedia and performance event)</p> <p>Income or budget underspends will be re-invested into either ancillary events or to support the potential for events to continue into second year of operation if successful.</p>
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Annually Recurring Costs/(savings)

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

Legal

13.2 None

Human Resources

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

13.4 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?

X

YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

NO

Repopulation

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

14.0 CONSULTATIONS

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

15.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

15.1 None