

The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the Coat of Arms of the City of Edinburgh. The crest includes a crown with four thistles, a shield divided into four quarters (top-left: saltire, top-right: stag's head, bottom-left: ship, bottom-right: eagle), and a motto scroll at the bottom.

Agenda Item 5

Referral from Scrutiny Committee – Coronavirus Update

Agenda Item 5

Title: Referral from Scrutiny Committee – Coronavirus Update

Meeting: Executive

Date: 15 June 2021

Submitted by: Chief Executive

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report refers the Coronavirus Update report from the Scrutiny Committee of 3 June 2021 for consideration.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Executive notes the information presented in the appended report which was referred by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting of 3 June 2021.

3. Background

- 3.1 At its meeting of 3 June 2021 the Scrutiny Committee agreed to refer the Coronavirus Update to the Executive for consideration. The report referred by the Scrutiny Committee is provided as an appendix to this report.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 No consultation was carried out on this report.

5. Implications

Financial

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from the report recommendations.

Resources

- 5.2 There are no resource implications arising from the report recommendations.

Legal

- 5.3 There are no legal implications arising from the report recommendations.

Risk

- 5.4 There are no risk implications arising from the report recommendations.

Equalities

- 5.5 There are no equalities implications arising from the report recommendations.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

- 5.6 No sustainability assessment has been completed as part of compiling the report.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The Scrutiny Committee agreed to refer the Coronavirus Update to the Executive for consideration.

Chief Executive

Author – Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager
01324 506110, brian.pirie@falkirk.gov.uk

Date: 3 June 2021

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Report to the Scrutiny Committee 'Coronavirus Update' – 3 June 2021

List of Background Papers:

No papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

Falkirk Council

Title: Coronavirus Update

Meeting: Scrutiny Committee

Date: 3 June 2021

Submitted By: Chief Executive

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The report attached summarises the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Falkirk area and the work of the Council to mitigate these through its actions on the response and recovery. In addition, this report indicates, for Member scrutiny, the work undertaken to debrief on the actions taken and the results of 'deep dive' actions relating to resilience and water quality in operational buildings.

2. Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee

- a) **notes the attached report on the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.**
- b) **notes the work undertaken to debrief on the Council's response, to identify lessons learned and the 'deep dive' reports undertaken for resilience and water quality in relation to the response to Covid-19.**
- c) **considers if this report requires to be forwarded to Executive for consideration, along with any additional comments that Scrutiny Committee would like to make.**
- d) **provide feedback on this report to inform the lessons learned and any future deep dive reviews.**
- e) **agrees that Scrutiny Committee receive a follow up on this work by December 2021.**

3. Background

- 3.1 In May 2020, the Emergency Executive considered a report on COVID response and recovery, and asked that a further update is presented to Scrutiny Committee. The Resilience Team have prepared a more detailed Scrutiny Committee paper on this. Additionally, in Autumn 2019, the Audit Committee and Executive asked that Corporate Risk 'deep dives' would be introduced to consider risks in further detail.
- 3.2 Council Members will be very aware of the global and national impact of COVID-19 since March 2020. Since Members were last addressed on this, at the meeting of Emergency Executive on 14 May 2020 our lives have changed to an extraordinary degree. Very few areas of the world lie untouched by the impacts of COVID-19 and our efforts to prevent it from fulfilling its destructive capability. At the time of writing the UK has suffered 127,640 deaths

associated with COVID-19. The corresponding numbers for Scotland are 7661 and 448 in the Forth Valley area. There have been 243 deaths from Covid-19 related illness in the Falkirk area since the start of the pandemic.

- 3.2 Over the past year the nation has been subjected to varying degrees of “lockdown” and, at the time of writing we are moving from Level 3 to Level 2. On a positive note, 64.9% of the Scottish population has had a first dose of the COVID vaccine and 33.6% have had their second dose and we are on track for everyone to have received a first dose by July and second dose by September.
- 3.3 The actions of Council services to address the response and recovery phases of the pandemic are summarised in the attached report. These are summarised in relation to:
- a) Resilience – the work undertaken to coordinate the local response and recovery measures
 - b) Children’s Services
 - c) Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP)...
 - d) Housing & Communities....
 - e) Falkirk Community Trust
 - f) Business Support
 - g) Development services
 - h) Lessons Learned
- 3.4 Further to this response, a series of ‘debriefing’ exercises has been undertaken by each service to assess the lessons learned from the experience of the pandemic and measures that are necessary to be embedded in practice. Deep dives have also been undertaken for Resilience and Water Quality in operational buildings.
- 3.5 This work is reported regularly to the Council’s Corporate Risk Management Group and subsequently at Audit Committee to aid planning for future risk and business continuity.

4. Considerations

Covid-19 Lessons learned

- 4.1 At the outset of the pandemic the business continuity plans of each service were enacted. This permitted a focus on delivery of essential services with social distancing etc. measures in place, conversion of ‘business as usual’ activities converted to home and digital methods of working and, where necessary, the postponement of service delivery in areas where safe working was unable to be sustained. It is important that the experience from handling the pandemic and lessons learned are taken into account to inform business continuity plans and the assessments of risk from future events that may face the Council.

Business Continuity - Debriefs

- 4.2 All Services in Falkirk Council, including Falkirk Community Trust and the Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership (including one care home and a supported housing complex) have had interim Structured Debriefs carried out in respect of how the Service reacted to the initial outbreak of Covid-19. Each

Service was provided with recommendations to consider as well as lessons learned and good practice. Overall, the debriefs were found to be very positive with a great deal of examples given of the goodwill, initiative and cross service working that has typified the Council's response. This work has informed this summary report. Amongst the key lessons learned from these debriefs were:

- the need for clear methods of command, control & communication across the strategic (CMT), tactical (Service) and operational (units and teams) levels of resilience support, involving co-opted advisors as necessary
- decision logs should be maintained to capture key decisions being made and actions required. These logs should be reviewed regularly.
- ensure parity of communication between staff working at home, in offices or deployed in operational settings
- review authoring rights to the Council website to enhance capacity for update
- to consider a review of work/life balance supporting mental health issues and addressing issues arising from staff working from home
- to review the approach to the engagement of volunteers, mapping as necessary to job profiles
- identify staff who have skills where they could assist colleagues in the continued delivery of critical functions.
- enhance the provision of ICT support to enable mobile & flexible working
- update business continuity plans in light of lessons learned from the debriefing following the pandemic.

4.3 These debriefs were then translated to an action plan for each Service and the common or corporate recommendations were then developed into a corporate action plan. Further debriefs will be carried out as and when required, further highlighting and developing the good practice and lessons learned and assisting with the recovery plans.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial

The financial implications for the Council of Covid-19 have been significant and are likely to last for some time. These have been advised to the Council and Executive in reports on the budget and business plan. A report with details of the expenditure impact is being prepared for the June Executive giving the most recent information on the budget effects of Covid-19, however, in summary, the impacts of Covid on the outturn of the Council's budget are summarised in the table below:

	March 2020/21 £'000
Government Funding	(33,978)
Loss of Income:-	
Service Fees and Charges	2,345
Council Tax	250
Commercial Rents	155
Net Additional Costs	13,718
Budget Savings Not Achieved	3,334
Integration Joint Board	-
Falkirk Community Trust	-
Overall (Surplus)/Deficit	(14,176)
COVID Funding C/Fwd	13,896
General Fund Movement	(280)

As shown above, the effects have been mitigated to a substantial extent by support received from Government, including direct grant awards and a set of fiscal flexibilities to help meet Covid-19 related costs.

Where necessary, the Council has allocated additional funds to respond to the crisis. This included a range of funds necessary to provide support for households adversely impacted by the crisis. Additional funds (£300k in 2020-21 & £500k in 2021-22/3) were also allocated to aid the economic response. In relation to Falkirk Community Trust, c£3.3m was received from the Job Retention Scheme for staff placed on furlough due to facility closures.

5.2 Resources

During the course of the pandemic the majority of employees were assisted to be able to continue to work during the lockdown period, either at work, with social distancing and other safety measures in place (and where permissible under the national guidance), or at home. Significant developments were made to the digital technology offered to employees; in particular, O365 which has continued to enable meetings, 1-1 support meetings and other support mechanisms to be put in place.

It is important to recognise the substantial efforts made by staff during the pandemic. Across each area of service there are examples where staff have acted far beyond their remits to meet the needs of communities. Situations of staff working longer hours, being redeployed or volunteering into roles where peaks of demand were being experienced were common. Without these efforts, Council

services would not have coped.

Regular communication was kept with the workforce through email and social media (many Facebook and WhatsApp groups were spawned). A dedicated page on the Council's website was established for employees to ensure they had easy access to changing employment guidance, information on Covid, and details on any changes to working arrangements. For those who can work from home, the national guidance confirms that this will remain the default way of working at Level 0. The majority of office-based staff will continue to work from home for the foreseeable future for most of their working week. To support this, employees have been provided with a range of IT equipment and offered an allowance to support the purchase of a desk and chair for the home to ensure a safe workplace.

Managers have been reminded of the steps they must take before employees can return to the workplace. This includes information on how workplaces should be designed to ensure a safe workspace including building checks, risk assessments, signage, hand sanitiser, cleaning arrangements. Where appropriate, individual risk assessments or 1-1 meetings should be undertaken to ensure that the health of employees is safeguarded prior to a return to the workplace.

Wellbeing has also been a key issue in managing our workforce. The impact of Covid has had a range of implications for individuals. In some cases this is due to the impact of Covid on an employee's family or their colleagues. In other cases there have been implications due to schools being closed and the childcare implications flowing from this. Working from home has also been of great benefit to some employees, whilst difficult for others. All such issues can impact on wellbeing. Managers have aimed to support employee wellbeing throughout this period. This is an on-going area of work and one which the Wellbeing Group continues to discuss and review.

5.3 Legal

There are no significant legal issues arising at this time. Governance staff have liaised closely with Services over the legal issues presented by any actions undertaken in response to Covid-19.

5.4 Risk

The Council's Corporate Risk Management Group met regularly through this period and, as agreed by the Executive conducted a series of 'deep dive' exercise on key areas of work relating to the effects of the pandemic:

- Resilience
- Water Quality in operational buildings

The results of this work, the lessons learned and the actions being taken forward as a consequence of the assessments is summarised in the Appendices attached to the Summary report.

A report will be presented to the forthcoming Audit Committee on levels of assurance on the Council's arrangements for risk management, governance, and control, based on audit work undertaken during 2020/21. This will include additional details on six additional Covid-19 related audits undertaken by the Internal Audit team.

5.5 Sustainability

The effects of lockdown were recognised to have had beneficial consequences for the environment with less consumption of carbon emitting fuels through reduced travel and heating/lighting of buildings. It is expected that a significant amount of home working will continue as a consequence of the pandemic. According to a European Environment Agency (EEA) report, there were temporary improvements in air quality, lower greenhouse gas emissions and lower levels of noise pollution. However, the agency does stress that there have been negative consequences such as increased use of single-use plastics, and that routes out of the pandemic should focus on reshaping our unsustainable production and consumption systems to achieve long-term environmental benefits.

5.6 Policy

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic for Council services were examined in the course of preparing the Council's new Corporate Plan and Business Plan. They involved a self-assessment process to better determine resource demands across the Council against the changes in the economic and social landscape experienced as a result of Covid-19. This was done via:

- surveys
- community conversations with third sector, parent forums, community groups, equalities groups
- engagement with employees and elected members.

In September 2020, a new set of Council priorities, Communities, Enterprise and Innovation, was established and these form the basis of the Council's Corporate and Business Plans. The priorities are supported by projects and actions that will influence & help carry forward the measures needed to aid recovery, including the Economic Recovery Plan, agreed by the Emergency Executive in September 2020.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been significant for the Falkirk area. It demanded a concerted approach by the Council to aid the response and recovery efforts. This work is still ongoing. This report demonstrates the significant actions that have been undertaken across the Council to aid the response and prepare for the area's recovery. The actions of the Council's workforces to meet the challenges presented by Covid-19 have been immense and it is important to acknowledge this effort. The debriefing work that has been undertaken indicates that many lessons have been learned (and will continue to be learned) for the area to fully recover.

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Chief Executive

Author(s):

APPENDICES

Annex: Covid-19 – Report on impact and Council response

List of Background Papers:

The following papers were relied upon in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

**Falkirk Council
Scrutiny Committee
June 2021**

Covid-19 – Report on impact and Council response



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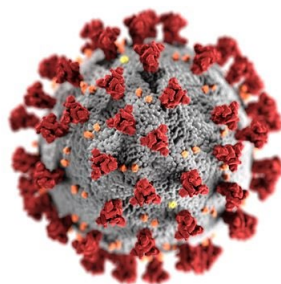
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- 7. Delivery of Business Support schemes**
- 8. Falkirk Community Trust**
- 9. Environmental Services**
- 10. Covid-19 Lessons learned**
- 11. Case Studies**
- 12. Conclusion**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of the impacts of Covid-19 on the Falkirk area and the actions of the Council to mitigate its effects, aid response and initiate recovery. In addition, this report indicates the work undertaken to debrief on the actions taken and the results of 'deep dive' actions relating to resilience and water quality in operational buildings.

2. Background

- 2.1 Council Members will be very aware of the global and national impact of COVID-19 since March 2020. At the meeting of Emergency Executive on 14 May 2020 Members were alerted that Covid-19 was likely to change our lives to an extraordinary degree. Very few areas of the world lie untouched by the impacts of COVID-19 and our efforts to prevent it from fulfilling its destructive capability. These changes have been advised to Members in a number of reports presented subsequently, indicating the financial, economic and social consequences of the pandemic.



- 2.2 At the time of writing the UK has suffered 127,640 deaths associated with COVID-19. The corresponding numbers for Scotland are 7661 and 448 in the Forth Valley area. There have been 243 deaths from Covid-19 related illness in the Falkirk area since the start of the pandemic.
- 2.2 Over the past year Scotland has been subjected to varying degrees of "lockdown" and, at the time of writing we are moving from Level 3 to Level 2 of lockdown measures (see table below).
- 2.3 A timeline of the lockdown intervention events in relation to Covid-19 is shown below:-

23 March 2020	Phase 1 intervention - first national lockdown
June 2020	Phase 2 intervention – phased easing of restrictions by area
October 2020	Phase 3 interventions – phased reintroduction of lockdown restrictions
26 December 2020	Full national lockdown restrictions re-imposed
17 May 2021	Lockdown restrictions eased

New COVID Levels for lockdown restrictions	Cases per 100,000
0	Close to 0
1	Under 20
2	20-50
3	50-150
4	150+

- 2.4 On a positive note, 64.9% of the Scottish adult population has had a first dose of the COVID vaccine and 33.6% have had their second dose. Scotland is on track for all adults to have received a first dose by July and second dose by September. The majority of Scotland moved to level 2 from the 17 May with the exception of Glasgow and Moray which at the present time still has high case numbers. A number of Scottish islands are moving to level 1 due to the very low case numbers.
- 2.5 It is important to recognise the impact of Covid-19 on the Falkirk area and the challenges our services have experienced in responding to the pandemic. The following table summarises some of the key facts relating to the pandemic's impact:
- There have been a total of 6861 cases of Covid-19 experienced by people across the Falkirk area
 - The current case rate for the Falkirk area is 32.3 per 100,000 people. At the height of the pandemic, on 5 January 2021, the rate reached 317.6 people per 100,000
 - There were 243 Covid-19 related deaths in the Falkirk area
 - A total of 210,326 Covid-19 tests have been undertaken in the Falkirk area
 - The current test positivity rate is 0.6% of those tested. At the height of the pandemic, the positivity rate reached 10.4 % for those tested were positive
 - A total of 97371 people have received their first vaccination and 52,228 have received their second dose of vaccination.
- 2.6 The actions of Council services to address the response and recovery phases of the pandemic are summarised in this report in relation to:
- a) Resilience – the work of the Council in coordinating local response and recovery measures
 - b) Children's Services
 - c) Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP)...
 - d) Housing & Communities....
 - e) Falkirk Community Trust
 - f) Business Support measures
 - g) Environmental services
- 2.7 In addition, a series of 'debriefing' exercises were undertaken by each Service to assess the lessons learned from the experience of the pandemic and ensure that they are embedded in practice. 'Deep dive' examinations of resilience and water quality in operation buildings have also been completed. This work is reported regularly to the Council's Corporate Risk Management Group to aid planning for future risk and business continuity. However it is important that the Council's response is publicly scrutinised by elected members. This report aims to assist this scrutiny.

3 Resilience & Covid Response

- 3.1 How public agencies are required to plan for and react during an emergency is described in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and regulations flowing from this legislation. Certain public bodies are categorised in the Act as either Category 1 or Category 2 responders. Local Authorities, along with Health Boards and the Emergency Services are included in Category 1 and as such have a direct responsibility to ensure an effective response to resilience events. Local Councils also have a lead role in the recovery phase of such events. The relevant responders in Scotland are grouped into three geographically based partnerships and Falkirk Council is a member of the East of Scotland Regional Resilience Partnership (EoSRRP).
- 3.2 The EoSRRP continued to meet during this crisis but the relevant work was still carried out at a more local level, in our case in the Forth Valley Local Resilience Partnership (FVLRP), or at the national level. The FVLRP meets on a bi-weekly basis, with senior representation from all relevant agencies. The current work of this group is managed via a series of sub groups and more information on them is included in para 3.4 below.
- 3.3 On a national basis, the Multi Agency Co-ordination Centre (MACC) was convened early on in the pandemic to help coordinate the response by relevant agencies. This strategic group was supported by a number of thematic subgroups dealing variously with support for people, death management, PPE, testing and recovery.
- 3.4 All resilience contingency plans are reviewed regularly by the EoSRRP. The key areas where the Council's resilience services have been contributing towards the partnership's co-ordinated effort are:-
- a. **Transport** – The support by Development Services fleet and transport teams to NHS allowing movement of goods, people and patients has continued throughout the past year. Support has also been given to schools to allow the movement of children, as schools re-opened and classes resumed. Staff resources were deployed where needed.
 - b. **Bereavement** - Falkirk Council Bereavement Services sustained its services throughout the pandemic. Early preparation for additional service demand was important and maintaining service provision prove challenging during the pandemic given the number of excess deaths and the Covid-19 related risks affecting staff and operational services. The second 'wave' of Covid-19 coincided with normal higher death peaks experienced over any winter i.e. in December, January and February. Frequent but necessary guidance for service provision was received from Scottish Government to ensure Covid-19 safe working practices and working environment for both staff and bereaved visitors.

Service provision was professionally maintained and augmented where necessary by staff volunteering pivoting to the changing needs of this Category 1 (Business Continuity) service. The 'Council of the Future' digital transformational projects allowed remote access particularly around webcasting provision (where the fee was waived during mourner restricted numbers) and the on line digital Book of Remembrance. This has been recognised by bereaved families.

A business case was made, approved and a new temporary cremator was procured and installed to increase resilience and remains in use.

Additional resources were secured which included

- a) staffing (voluntary redeployment of existing staff, new/trainee staff) and
- b) equipment (cremator, tractor, welfare unit, PPE etc)

These measures helped address the increased demand and safe working practices. Staff resilience, morale and capacity to embrace change at pace has been valued and appreciated with several positive comments received from members of the public..

Finally, effective communication continues at a local level with Business Support staff tracking bookings, linked into analytics at Forth Valley using a Daily Dashboard to track progress. Updates and effective communication across partners within the funeral sector including regular Scottish Government updates has been invaluable.

Bereavement services will continue to input into resilience, risk and business continuity planning regarding lessons learned for continuous service improvement.

c. Testing



The resilience team assisted the rollout of testing capacity across the area. There are currently 2 testing streams active in the Falkirk Council area:

- PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) and
- LFD (Lateral Flow Device).

The PCR testing is delivered by a Mobile Testing Unit (MTU) and administered by the Scottish Ambulance Service. Falkirk Council has one full time MTU, based at Abbotsford House and is open between 1000hrs and 1800hrs, 7 days

per week. In addition to this full-time testing station, there is a PCR testing station every alternate week in Bo'ness. Further developments in the MTU model are being considered.

The LFD asymptomatic community testing programme established one fixed site at Polmont Sports Centre This site was operated by Falkirk Community Trust in partnership with Falkirk Council.

From 24th May Forth Valley NHS will begin the second phase of the Asymptomatic Testing programme which is scheduled to end April 2022. This model will have a mix of one fixed site with additional portable accommodation units at strategic sites. This includes one site at Howgate shopping centre and Falkirk stadium. This plan is flexible enough to upscale and downscale depending upon public demand and any future legislation changes.

Information on the Support for People services is available at the testing centres to assist people to access help should they test positive. This includes information translated into the most commonly used languages across the Falkirk Council area.

- d. **Business Support** – There has been a great deal of communication with, and support in respect of resilience and health for, essential businesses. Early in the pandemic, those businesses in sectors deemed essential for e.g. the supply of food, fuel or logistics were provided with authorisation letters enabling employees to travel to work. Assistance was offered to local businesses at risk of Covid outbreaks in order to maintain production.

Work has continued with Environmental Health through social media (Ezine) to encourage use of local testing centres. There has been a good outreach to residents through the tenant's database which has proven successful in getting people tested.

A Covid Town Centre working group was set up to provide support to retailers and the hospitality industry within the town centre. Advice on planning, environmental health, licensing and public roads was given via a 'one-stop' approach managed by Development Services. This single point of contact was able to assist with issues and proposals and offer solutions to help business re-open safely. Information was also posted regularly on the Falkirk Council website (Business Support web page) in relation to Covid-19, Grants and Funds available for businesses.

- e. **PPE** – the PPE Co-ordination Group met at least every two weeks from the end of March 2020. The PPE Group involved a network of key stakeholders working to ensure that Services could provide PPE to those who need it.

PPE requirements, stock control and distribution continue to be managed by our single Hub based at Falkirk Council's Central Stores in Grangemouth. The Hub continues to work with the Scottish Government and NHS National Services Scotland's National Procurement (NSS) to ensure health and social care staff have the provision required,.

The Council continues to source PPE through our normal supply routes, where available and alternative routes through NHS and Scotland Excel to support a national and co-ordinated sourcing of PPE.

PPE is being distributed to personal assistants and unpaid carers. The PPE Hub works in partnership with Falkirk Carers Centre and Self-Directed Support Forth Valley to identify and maintain PPE needs among these groups. PPE is delivered directly to the home of the employer/carer.

Advice for staff, carers and volunteers who require PPE is updated and revised to reflect current guidance; accessible information briefings are available on the Council web pages. A dedicated PPE mailbox and mobile number provide a single point of contact with PPE supplies and advice provided quickly.

We continue to update the profile of the anticipated demand for PPE across the Council, HSCP and providers of social care. PPE requirements are continually updated as we build up our understanding on the use of PPE. Any change to guidance on the use of PPE also has an impact on demand levels. We have to be alert to any changes and again, the PPE group allows us to share new guidance and consider the implications – taking the learning directly back to our services.

- f. **Communications** – Over the past 14 months, there has been a huge demand for clear and targeted communications as our communities responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially this was a very rapidly changing environment and the public had to adjust to a whole range of public health measures as well as changes to our services that had to be communicated clearly and quickly.

Over the last 14 months, many updates have been provided with both Scottish Government and the NHS which has been shared via our social media channels. Advice and guidance on the appropriateness of our communications to reach the large variety of target audiences has been given throughout to all services.

Our website has been resilient throughout with information for both the public and employees regularly updated as new arrangements were announced. The COVID-19 section of the website comprehensively covered what alternative arrangements for our services were in place and reacted fluidly to changes in the severity of the outbreak.

Regular briefings were given to Elected Members to aid communication of changes in service and the effects of the pandemic as it progressed. These were vitally important in aiding communication with a range of community and voluntary organisations and the wider public.

Moving forward, we continue to share national guidance wherever relevant and support all services as they revert to a more 'normal' model of delivery.

- g. **Recovery** - An update report on the recovery arrangements for employees returning to work was considered by Emergency Executive in September 2020. This provided details on the arrangements anticipated at that time for lifting lockdown

Guidance and information has been continually provided to Services to support the recovery and return to work. This work is being undertaken in line with any announcements by the Scottish Government on the phased lifting of the lockdown. This relates to front line service delivery, home working and the ability to operate face to face advice within the community. Services are required to assess their service provision against the national advice and phased lifting of lockdown -with some services continuing to be delivered remotely where possible and in line with the national guidance.

It is worth highlighting that a number of employees have continued to work during the lockdown period, whilst others have more recently returned to the workplace. For those who can work from home, the national guidance states that this should remain the default way of working at Level 0, although at this stage,. The majority of office based staff will continue to work from home for the foreseeable future for most of their working week. To support this, employees were provided with appropriate IT equipment and offered an allowance to support the purchase of a desk and chair for the home to ensure a safe workplace. Where employees are returning to offices, they are now being equipped with a docking station to enable employees to connect their laptop directly to the fixed monitors already on the desk.

Managers have been reminded of the steps they must take before employees can return to the workplace. This includes information on how offices and workplaces should be designed to ensure a safe workspace including building checks, risk assessments, signage, hand sanitiser, cleaning arrangements. Whilst physical distancing remains in place, occupancy levels will continue to be to c30% in buildings. To support employees, a video is available showing employees what to expect in the workplace and how it will look when they return. For those employees who have been shielding, who are pregnant or who have been self-isolating due to health reasons, very specific guidance has been provided to managers which requires an individual risk assessment to be undertaken. This ensures that we are considering their health situation prior to a return to the workplace.

Work continues to support the reopening of buildings. Since lockdown commenced most buildings have been partially open; some only on a very limited basis to support accessing files for example. The full reopening of buildings is being aligned where possible to the Strategic Property Review with priority being given to public facing buildings. Some employees may continue to be relocated to alternative offices to ensure adequate support is provided but also to reduce the number of buildings fully reopening.

4 Children's Services response to Covid-19

- 4.1 The service had to respond in an agile manner to the continually changing landscape of expectations and demands which were placed on our schools - from the early days of preparing to go into lockdown all the way through to the current position where schools are open. We are continuing to respond to positive cases in our educational establishments, reengage our learners and undertake all the tasks normally delivered by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to certify our senior stage pupils, ahead of the summer holidays.
- 4.2 During the first lockdown we developed our hub model across 7 locations to provide childcare to keyworkers and vulnerable learners. Headteachers, senior colleagues, teachers, support assistants, catering and cleaning colleagues all stepped up to attend the hubs and fully engaged in support of this crucial area of delivery.
- 4.3 Concurrently with the running of our hubs, all other colleagues continued to engage with their learners to provide online, remote learning or where this was not possible, ensure suitable equipment, resources and support was available to enable our children and young people to engage.



- 4.4 Over the past year, education's offer has become increasingly sophisticated and comprehensive. We operated to ensure Falkirk Council Children's Services Education Division has maintained its fidelity to the three overarching priorities for the Service which are:

Raising Attainment & Achievement:

Raise attainment for every child and young person and enable them to make excellent progress through their learning journey 3–18yrs.

Wellbeing, Equality & Inclusion:

Improve processes to support attainment and positive destinations for Falkirk's vulnerable children and young people.

Skills & Attributes Development:

Improve attainment and positive destinations for Falkirk's young people.

- 4.5 Since March 2020, our response and recovery plans have provided ELCCs and schools with support and guidance for the operational and strategic management of sustaining quality learning experiences for all children and young people whether that be face-to-face or remotely.
- 4.6 Throughout the pandemic, the service and school Improvement team have worked in collaboration and partnership with Early Learning and Child Care Heads of Centre, Primary, ASN and Secondary headteachers. Together we have created a supportive framework of guidance and support within which ELCC, and school teams can work flexibly and creatively to meet the unique needs their settings.
- 4.7 We are proud of the adaptations, developments innovations to learning, teaching and communication that have kept our educators connected to children, young people and their families. Assessing the quality of remote learning experiences has been a focus for all our settings. The use of the Microsoft Teams insight function and other processes have enabled teams to track and monitor the level of pupils' engagement.
- 4.8 Our Blended, then Remote Learning Guidance set clear expectations of face-to-face engagement with children and young people. Alongside this we worked with senior leaders and our Connected Falkirk digital learning team to create website for support and resources that can be accessed by learners, parents and staff.
- 4.9 Our Service and School Improvement Framework site has continued to provide strategy, support, professional learning opportunities and resources.
- 4.10 ELCC and Primary 1 - 3 returned on the 22nd of February. This time has been well used to assess where children are in their learning and to plan targeted support and interventions for those who require it.
- 4.11 On the 15th of March 2021 we welcomed back our primary 4 -7 pupils full time and our S1 -S6 pupils in a blended approach. The same focus on assessing where our pupils are is planned. SSI officers and headteachers are already working together to identify what further supports may be required to move learning forward at individual school level, from the service and nationally.
- 4.12 The Service provides each school with a summary profile of key data. For example, the level of Free School Meal Entitlement (FME), attendance, Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSAs) performance, Curriculum for excellence levels and percentage of children requiring additional support.
- 4.13 The Service updates its guidance for the implementation and analysis pf SNSAs annually. P4,7 and S3 did their assessments between October and December 2020. Primary 1 will be assessed between April and May. This provides further diagnostic information as part of the suite formative and summative assessments that will be used.
- 4.14 In addition, the latest Service lift of current Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels attainment data for all stages in the Broad General Education P1 - S3 has

been analysed to provide schools with current CfE assessment data by:

- Individual school
- Cluster group – (geographical association with secondary school)
- Neighbourhood Group – similar Scottish Index for Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) and FME demographic.

- 4.15 Transitions for children of all ages and stages have been considered in all our response and recovery plans. We have provided more detailed support and guidance for the key stages of ELC into Primary 1 and for P7 in first year. In 2020, the creativity and efforts of teams to make this as robust and supportive as possible for families was tremendous in Falkirk. Digital approaches were developed to provide children and young people with virtual tours, introduction to staff and family learning activities. Door to door drop offs of resources and information were common.
- 4.16 Transition approaches have been further sustained and evolved. Primary 7 -S1 transition started last term. Our secondary schools have dedicated P7 transition websites and are already planning for a blend of continued virtual experiences with face-to-face learning and activities as soon as it is safe to do so.
- 4.17 We recognise that the pandemic has impacted on traditional P7 residential experiences in 2020 and again this year. Many Falkirk schools organise these trips with their cluster schools. We value the skills, attributes and connections that children develop through these experiences. In response we collaborated with our active schools and outdoor learning colleagues to pool resources to provide a targeted programme of activities for all Falkirk Council's P7 pupils in term 4.
- 4.18 The Education team have responded at pace to support the new demands being placed on secondary schools in relation to the SQA Alternative Certification Model. Clear guidance was co-created with colleagues from across the service. This included comprehensive moderation and quality assurance processes to enable Falkirk to have robust information in support of the decisions that will be made on the attainment of our senior pupils. Our processes have been scrutinised by Education Scotland and have been held up as examples of best practice.
- 4.19 All educational establishments and teams are continuing to navigate through the emerging challenges and expectations. Measures are likely to be required for the foreseeable future.

Children's Services Social Work (children and families & justice services)

Delivering children's services social work

- 4.20 The majority of children's statutory social work services are considered to be critical, therefore they continued to operate during both national lockdown periods. There have been a range of complex new challenges to navigate and all services were impacted in numerous ways as we worked together to continue to offer support for both the care and protection needs of children, families and adults. With support from Social Work Scotland, Scottish Government, the Council's Health and Safety Team and TU colleagues we have followed the national position detailed in guidance; this has been the bedrock of our journey during the pandemic. Local operational guidance was developed to support the delivery of services during the pandemic, these have been updated and refreshed as required.
- 4.21 Children & Families Social Work services quickly moved away from locality-based offices and have operated out of Sealock House in Grangemouth since April 2020. Justice and Children's staff worked both from office bases and from home, operating from rotas and being responsive and flexible to protect vulnerable people.
- 4.22 Social workers have found it difficult to work from home because they deal with very sensitive, complex situations which are harrowing and traumatic. Operating without easy access to colleague support and management direction are impacting on wellbeing. We provide people focused services that to be meaningful, depend on culture and systems that support relationships-based practice. It's critical that we find the ways and means going forward, in these uncertain times, to ensure this remains at the heart of our thinking and actions. Despite the challenges and new ways of working, staff have consistently demonstrated how driven they are by their professional ethics and commitment to the relationships they have with children, adults and families.
- 4.23 Staff have been very creative in their efforts to stay engaged with service users. Throughout the early stages of the pandemic, a focus on collaborative working with partners, providers and community groups was essential to maintaining supports to those most in need. Wherever possible we have supported our service users to take part in meetings to ensure they are involved in planning and decision making. Access to devices and connectivity continues to be challenging.
- 4.24 Falkirk has a higher rate of children with a child protection plan than the Scottish average. Despite these higher rates, Falkirk has maintained a high percentage of child protection visits during the pandemic. The hubs which operated out of our schools during lockdown provided much needed support for children and their families; children on the child protection register were prioritised.
- 4.25 The Unpaid Work Service within Justice Services was suspended during lockdown but resumed in April 2021. The service has adapted to ensure service users can undertake unpaid work tasks within current guidance. Justice services are benefitting from one year COVID response funding to add capacity to the workforce to support the expansion of services needed to reduce hours that have built up over lockdown. Our Court and prison based social workers have returned to duty in those settings.
- 4.26 From the very outset of the pandemic, we have been alert to the likelihood that there

would be pent-up demand which would manifest over the weeks following on from the initial lockdown. Many families and individuals are experiencing negative impact resulting from unemployment, poverty and this is impacting on mental health, we know we need to carefully consider the type of supports people will need post COVID-19.

- 4.27 Many families who have been “just coping” prior to lockdown are likely to have been negatively impacted either through financial disadvantage, isolation, loneliness, unemployment or loss of support networks. The Information and Support Line for Falkirk Families was developed in partnership with Barnardo’s and Aberlour. Falkirk Council has supported the use of 5 operational communication lines with one central contact number for callers. This new service adds to the network of support already available and aims to strengthen the range of supports for children, adults and families in Falkirk. The service is open and accessible on a universal basis however includes a targeted offer to more vulnerable families, many of whom may have had a reduction or disruption to their children’s plans. Considerations are ongoing to continue with this service in the longer term.

Impact on budget

- 4.28 The impact of COVID related expenditure has resulted in overspend for the children and families social work budget. Planning for children to return home or to kinship care, or to local foster care have been delayed as a result of lockdown. Some children and young people are at risk of harm and needed to be looked after away from home during lockdown. The service has been unable to provide the levels of family support intervention required.
- 4.29 Savings which were committed in the 20/21 budget, to be delivered via The Closer To Home Strategy have not been fully achieved as result of the implications of COVID (£700K was delivered). Funding from the Scottish Government (Social Protection Funding) has been utilised to provide additional staffing capacity in children and families services and provided opportunities for us to enhance our family support services and improve the experiences and outcomes for children and young people.

Supporting the Workforce

- 4.29 We are committed to organisational and employee wellbeing but there is significant pressure on individuals and services presently. Taking action to identify and reduce stress in the workplace has seen us increase awareness of mental health issues and provide learning and development opportunities aimed at building personal resilience and offering employee assistance programmes. The impact of the current pandemic on employee morale alongside the significant shift in using technology as the primary means of communication brings multi-faceted challenges which require careful, ongoing consideration. For us to remain proactive in our approach to wellbeing we need to maintain our investment and continue to provide opportunities to actively listen to employees across our services.

5. Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP)

- 5.1 Throughout the past year, health and social care services have operated on an emergency footing under national guidance. The situation has been very fluid within the HSCP, with services having to continually respond to emerging pressures. In addition to reports being presented to the Integration Joint Board and its Committees, Falkirk Council received update/ debrief reports on the HSCP response to the pandemic on 25 June 2020, 11 and 16 December 2020 and 11 May 2021. An HSCP Mobilisation Team was established quickly in March 2020. This provides a central contact point for information exchange and response planning and deployment.
- 5.2 As part of the immediate response to the pandemic, an HSCP Mobilisation Team was established in March 2020. This included representatives from all HSCP services, Procurement and Commissioning Team, Third and Independent sector representatives. The team held daily Huddles and these provided a central contact point for information exchange and response planning and deployment.
- 5.3 The mobilisation team continues to adapt to the changing situation, stepping its response up and down as appropriate. In response to the current national tiers and community transmission levels, the all-team huddle meetings are currently in place on a fortnightly basis, with daily status reporting to the on-duty manager to help immediately identify emerging needs across services. Through the huddles, the HSCP have redeployed staff across services to ensure the safe delivery of care to service users and staff and to maintain care in our care homes, hospital sites and care at home services
- 5.4 The experience gained over the last year has accelerated integrated working and has fostered new relationships between teams and services. This has included staff from within the Partnership and volunteers from other Council services and Falkirk Community Trust, who have been provided with training and support to work alongside core staff, to augment workforce capacity.
- 5.5 Since May 2020 the HSCP and NHS Forth Valley have been working with care homes and care home staff to support and assure infection prevention and control measures, support outbreak management and to ensure that fundamental care needs of residents are being met.
- 5.6 This is as a direct response to the Scottish Government directive to HSCP's, the Chief Officer worked with Director of Public Health, Director of Nursing, Medical Director and Chief Social Work Officer to establish a strategic oversight group to provide care assurance over local care homes. The Falkirk model was used to inform the development of the national care assurance model and guidance.
- 5.7 The partnership took direct responsibility for the clinical support required for each care home in their board area. To support the local care system the HSCP established a social care 'Care Home Assessment Review Team' (CHART). This is a pivotal, dynamic and responsive team that works alongside other clinical health teams to ensure that there is daily monitoring and management of the impact of Covid-19 on the safety, wellbeing and outcomes of residents and staff within care homes and the ongoing provision of services.

- 5.8 The CHART team has responded to the pandemic via a range of measures including 'Back to Basics' contact (guidance on cleaning schedules, use of PPE, Covid isolation guidance), assurance visits, care home visiting risk assessments, support for Covid-19 staff testing and support for Covid-19 vaccinations in care homes.



- 5.9 The Adult Protection Committee has a range of duties linked to what is happening locally to safeguard adults. These include reviewing adult protection practices, improving co-operation, improving skills and knowledge, providing information and advice and promoting good communication.
- 5.10 There has been a significant increase in ASP referrals from 2019/20 to 2020/21. When comparing reporting periods, in 2019/20 576 referrals were received and 805 referrals were received in 2020/21. This significant increase has impact in terms of multiagency capacity and resources. The level of need is being met and quality assurance mechanisms continue to monitor the delivery of our key ASP processes, support and protection. The difficulties in recruiting qualified workers last year is acknowledged in addition to the challenges due to a decrease in face to face contact due to the restrictions and front line practitioners shielding.
- 5.11 There has been an improvement in the number of Initial Case Conferences and this demonstrates a commitment towards shared responsibility and multiagency collaborative working in the support and protection of adults.
- 5.12 All internal and external Day Care provision was stopped during the first lockdown in 2020. This included community based groups such as lunch clubs. HSCP have worked with Corporate & Housing Services and third sector partners to ensure that services users, unpaid carers and families have continued to receive support where possible.
- 5.13 A flexible approach was taken in many community-based services. For example, [Falkirk's Royal Voluntary Service](#) changed its delivery model within a matter of weeks to continue providing remote, online, and socially distanced support. Since March 2020, the effort from 180,000 volunteer hours has achieved:
- 10,051 Safe and well checks.
 - 1,226 Garden Gate Chats.
 - 5,575 Essential shopping or medication deliveries.
- 5.10 A three-phased reopening of the Partnership's adult day services began from Monday 10 May. Initially, people with the highest care needs will be invited to return to our service based at the Dundas Resource Centre. HSCP Community

Learning and Development staff and CVS Falkirk are also providing support to volunteer-led groups about safely restarting services.

5.11 HSCP representatives were also part of the Support for People Co-ordination Group. The HSCP contributed to the enabling, solution focussed partnership approach by:

- Swift realignment of HSCP community funds to form a Covid response fund for communities.
- Offering assurance and support to third sector and community based partners that funding could be used flexibly to enable continuous support for service users.
- Provision of specialist support regarding PPE, food preparation and hygiene for local community food providers.
- Providing information and support to communities to increase awareness about how to identify and raise Adult Support and Protection concerns.
- Establishing and maintaining links between HSCP service response and local community response to enhance joined working e.g. working with community pharmacies to deliver prescriptions, provision of emergency food to vulnerable service users.

5.12 The HSCP commissioned an additional 18 block funded beds for older people within a local care home from 1 February 2020 until 31 July 2021. This term may be extended. Beds are funded at the nationally agreed residential or nursing fee rates. The breakdown for the beds is 15 frail elderly and three complex care placements for service users who require nursing or residential support to alleviate current hospital pressures.

5.13 In addition, six block funded beds for younger adults (under 65s) with complex care needs, were also commissioned at a local care home from 23 March 2020 until 30 November 2020. Following scoping the need for additional beds, an informed decision was made to reduce the block funded beds from six to three.

5.14 With regard to the HSCP MECS Service, the number of emergency calls made to homes actually decreased in the early part of the outbreak. It is thought that people were reluctant to allow access to their homes. However, the need in the community increased as the pandemic developed. The main objective of the MECS service has been to assist with early hospital discharges.



- 5.15 As with other services, MECS experienced significant staff absence due to shielding and illness. In order to meet the increased demand on the service, some staff from day care services volunteered to support MECS whilst their services were closed. This was also augmented with agency staff.
- 5.16 The HSCP also established a range of support for staff to support their health and wellbeing and resilience in the face of the pandemic.
- 5.17 It is important to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of all staff and volunteers over the period of the ongoing pandemic, to continue to deliver care in challenging circumstances. Our services have a crucial role in supporting individuals to remain at home, connected to family and friends and their local community.

Alcohol & Drugs Partnership Update

- 5.18 During the past year, the Community Alcohol and Drug Service (CADS), Change Live Grow (CGL), Forth Valley Recovery Community (FVRC) and the Forth Valley Family Support Service (FVFS) have all continued to support those in need, and their families. Services have maintained access during the whole period for an extremely vulnerable population, for whom the risk of Covid 19 was enhanced. The staff within these services have demonstrated a high level of commitment which has enabled stability for those who use these services.
- 5.19 With a particular focus on harm reduction and the provision of Medicine Assisted Treatment (MAT) being the key priority, it is clear from performance data that delivery has been steady and largely unchanged from the norm. Novel practice and innovation has been required by services. They needed to be agile and adapt new methods of engagement. An extension was granted temporarily for the Harm Reduction Service delivered by Transform Forth Valley, to further enable the distribution of Injecting Equipment Provision (IEP) and Naloxone. The use of their mobile vehicle was considered helpful in aiding access to those unable to attend services.
- 5.20 CGL Harm Reduction Service also continued to provide an assertive outreach service to ensure that those in need of support were kept safe through the provision of Naloxone, harm reduction advice and injecting equipment. The temporary extension for the Transform Harm Reduction service has now stopped, however, they will still continue to provide Naloxone to those in need. This is in line with the extended Lord Advocates Guidance for non-drug services to provide Naloxone.
- 5.21 Forth Valley Recovery Community and Forth Valley Family Support Service both increased their online presence during the crisis. The legacy of this work will help increase access going forward. Many people who would perhaps not have engaged have done so because of online access.
- 5.22 The ADP services have gradually re-introduced face-to-face support, in line with guidelines. All services will look to adopt the learning from digital engagement processes that were put in place during the pandemic. Online appointments and mobile phone contact will be introduced as options. Online group work and family support meetings will also prevail on the new regimes. Some people will not return to daily pick up of their Medicine Assisted Treatment (MAT) as they have managed well.

5.23 Additional Covid 19 Mobilisation investment made by the HSCP to both CGL and Forth Valley Recovery Community has proved invaluable. These services are currently seeking solutions to enable the continuation of this additional resource going forward.

6. Housing and Communities –

- 6.1 **Housing** - The Service has worked with colleagues in Health & Safety to develop safe ways of working and by adapting to change and new ways of working we have maintained our service provision throughout the duration of the pandemic.
- 6.2 Our critical areas of business such as homelessness services, support services and supported accommodation continued uninterrupted. Our housing allocations has been fully operational since 1st July 2020. We adjusted our face to face approach and adopted new ways to engage and communicate with colleagues and customers digitally across the whole of the business. The annual tenant check in was undertaken by telephone. Housing staff undertook annual tenant visits by telephone, this received positive feedback and also helped identify support needs. Housing staff have been visible within communities undertaking work in relation to the capital investment programme and general estate management issues such as fly tipping and close management. We have undertaken several major consultations despite staff working from home and encouraged the uptake of digital connectivity, which also links into the Digital Connectivity agenda.
- 6.3. **Communities** - Throughout the pandemic, Falkirk Council worked in partnership with a large number of third sector organisations, and community groups alongside other public sector partners and CVS Falkirk. This partnership approach enabled and supported the resilience within our communities and demonstrated the extent of support that can be delivered to people through partnership working. We are promptly and proactively building on this approach and the positive working relationships it generated with our local communities through increased online community conversations with communities of place about the future, their community assets and how we will work together to support the impacts of the pandemic on our most vulnerable. Furthermore, in support of this approach, we have launched Community Choices to enable communities to have direct influence over how public funds are used to support their goals and vision. We will continue to build and support community leadership and adapt our processes and culture to support this new relationship with our communities. Through this work with communities we continue to work to address poverty and inequalities, recognising the disproportionate impact that the pandemic has had on people living on a low income.



Closer to Communities team

6.4 **Support for People** - Staff across Corporate and Housing continue to support people impacted by the pandemic via:

- Inbound Support for People calls from people in need of food or other essentials
- Outbound Test and Protect calls to people who are required to self-isolate, to make sure their essential needs are met
- Additional support to people at risk of financial instability including supporting community food provision and financial support to tackle fuel poverty and digital exclusion

6.5 The support for people service had 21,735 telephone contacts in its first year including

- 9462 inward enquiries from people in need of support due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to this we
- 5349 outbound calls to people who are self-isolating as part of Test and Protect
- 6924 people on the shielding list who we contacted to check they had everything they needed

6.6 The commitment and dedication shown by staff across the whole of the service provided a lifeline to essential provision and a listening ear to those severely affected by isolation and loneliness. Housing & Communities acknowledged the intensity of the working environment and have aimed to support staff through the provision of specialist training to increase skills in responding to those affected by the pandemic and learning self awareness and ways to care for their own wellbeing.

6.7 The Support for People service relied heavily on the local Community groups and would not have worked without the volunteers who give up their time to help others in their communities.

6.8 Falkirk Council received funding from the Scottish Government to support people impacted by the pandemic. This funding has supported the following:

6.9 **Fuel Poverty**

We are offering £75 payment to low income households who have to self-isolate. We are also offering £100 payment low income households who are shielding, in temporary or supported accommodation, in an off gas area or residing on our travelling persons site. By mid May 2021 we had supported 753 households with their fuel costs at a total cost of £74 450.

6.10 **Connectivity and Data Top ups**

At the start of March we launched a new short term service where Council services, partners and third sector agencies can refer people to us for a £25 payment to help them with the costs of staying connected during the Covid restrictions. We check to see if they live in a low income household (in receipt of Council Tax Reduction – which is an exemption from Council tax costs for low income households).

The service ran to the 30th April (in line with the easing of the Covid Restrictions on

26th April). By mid May 2021 the service had supported 707 individuals/households with the costs of staying connected during the Covid pandemic at a total cost of £17 675.

6.11 Covid-19 Digital Exclusion Fund



In March 21 we launched a short term small grants fund to build on the Connecting Scotland model, by offering grants of up to £5000 to services and partners to purchase devices and connectivity for households who are digitally excluded due to cost.

Applications were reviewed by a panel from Fairer Falkirk, Community Learning and Development and CVS Falkirk. The panel recommended funding all 26 applications at a total cost of £114k. This will support at least 351 individuals/households who are currently digitally excluded.

6.12 Free school meal direct payments for self-isolating pupils

Processes were set up at the end of last year to support pupils required to self-isolate. Before schools closed at Christmas we had paid out for 253 pupil self-isolations.

This service was re-established with schools going back at the start of March and has now supported a total of 416 pupil self-isolations at a cost of £6 336 (mid May).

6.13 Community Food Provision



Community food distribution involved a wide range of partners

Administered by CVS Falkirk we have supported and continue to support Community organisations across the Falkirk area to provide food to people who need it. During March 2021 Community food providers across Falkirk supported ~1100 households.

6.14 Volunteer Expenses

Administered by CVS Falkirk, this fund reimburses volunteers who are working with constituted community groups for their travel expenses. This reduces bureaucracy for the community groups and makes sure volunteers are not out of pocket.

6.15 Additional Income maximisation support

Through our Covid-19 funding we've provided extra funding support to the three CABs to put on additional support to help people apply for benefits. This is in response to the increase in demand they are experiencing due to the pandemic, from people who have no experience of applying for out of work benefits. By April 2021 this had supported an additional 184 appointments.

6.16 Supporting Falkirk's approach to free school meals and associated payments

Falkirk's charges and concessions policy states that where we charge for a service, that charge should be reduced to zero for people in receipt of income related benefits. On that basis we have extended our free school meal entitlement to include all pupils living in households in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. This is a wider

group then entitled under the Scottish Government scheme.

During the pandemic we made direct payments to parent/carers in lieu of free school meals during school holidays and school closures. This supported ~ 5618 pupils. Whilst the Scottish Government provide funding for this, additional covid funding was used to make up the shortfall to allow us to continue with our £3.50 per day rate and also to support our wider cohort. We have also used this funding to enable us to make the spring payment and family pandemic payments to our wider group of pupils.

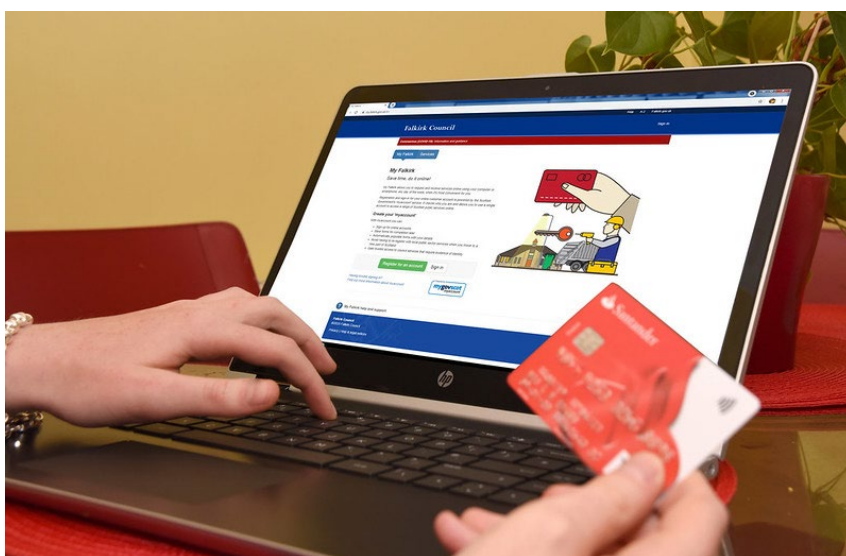
6.17 Connecting Scotland - Falkirk applications

The Connecting Scotland programme provides devices, connectivity and support to individuals who are digitally excluded. So far 1002 people across the Falkirk area have received devices/connectivity/support from Connecting Scotland. This includes older people, people with disabilities, vulnerable families and care experienced young people.

A detailed report on the Covid Support for People funding was considered by Falkirk Council Executive on 11th May 2021. This report provides more detail on the funding mentioned above as well as how further funding will be allocated to ensure support continues.

7. Delivery of Business Support schemes

- 7.1 From the outset of lockdown, the Council's Economic Development and Finance staff have combined to deliver a substantial range of financial support measures on behalf of the Scottish Government. Since April 2020, 20 different business grant funding schemes have been administered by Scottish local authorities including generic grant funds such as the Business Support Fund and Strategic Framework Business Funds, or specific sector funds for tourism and hospitality. Additionally targeted funds have been delivered to support the Newly Self Employed, Taxis and the Discretionary Fund for those businesses that have not been eligible for any grant support.
- 7.2 Since the pandemic, Business Gateway has continued to be reactive to business need and offers the service on-line. The number of interactions carried out increased significantly in relation to Scottish Government Covid-19 grant support. Business Gateway has developed a number of resources that are available on its website and national webinars enabled advisory support to local businesses. Since the pandemic Business Gateway Falkirk advisors, working with Finance Services staff have been instrumental in providing Scottish Government grant support to businesses in the Falkirk area. Support to businesses has also be provided through Resilience and Adaption Grants as part of the Economic Recovery Plan and putting in place new Expert Help contracts offering specialist company support, all supported by Falkirk Council and matched funded with final European Funding ERDF schemes prior to ending in 2022.



Online application for business grant support

- 7.3 In total approximately 5,870 Scottish Government grant applications have been processed and awarded and £41m of funding dispersed to Falkirk businesses. This has involved economic development, revenues, business fraud and web services working together to support this effort. Funding schemes have been launched and applications processed, often over at short notice. In total, 20 separate application processes that have had to be developed and promoted on the Council's website and social media platforms. Appeals have also been considered and, where necessary, fraud investigated. Internal audit have reviewed this work and confirmed a 'substantial assurance' on all funds audited.
- 7.4 The table below summarise all funds administered and awarded as at 23 March 2021

SG CV-19 Grant Fund	Businesses Supported/ Grants Awarded	Amount (£m)
Small Business Support Fund & Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Fund	2175	24.37875
Contingency Fund - Nightclubs	2	0.075
Brake Restrictions Fund	169	0.463
Furlough Top-up Fund	87	0.143
Newly Self Employed Hardship Fund	145	0.29
Bed & Breakfast Hardship Fund	3	0.009
Discretionary Fund as @ 26 March	452	0.904
Discretionary Fund 2 as @ 5 May	599	1.538
Taxi Fund @ 5 May	456	0.684
Strategic Framework Grant @ 5 May	929	6.412725
SF Hospit, Retail & Leisure Top Up @ 5 May	818	5.593
Contingency Plus - Travel Agents	7	0.115
Contingency Plus - Brewers	2	0.02
Contingency Plus - Indoor Football Centres	1	0.025
Exclusive Use	0	0
Large Self Catering	5	0.01
Small accommodation Providers Wave 1	2	0.012
Small accommodation Providers Wave 2	0	0
Small accommodation Providers Wave 3	5	0.03
Licensed Bingo & Casino Support Fund	12	0.6
TOTAL	5869	41.302475

7.5 It is important to recognise the impacts of the pandemic on unemployment:

- from March to January 2021, working age people claiming unemployment in the Falkirk area increased by 75.3%
- unemployment for those aged 16-24 has increased from 675 to 1,240 from March 2020 to January 2021. This is an increase of 83.7%.
- The rate for youth unemployment now stands at 8.0% (for 25-49 year olds it is 6.0% and for over 50s, 4.2% - January 2021)

7.6 Due to rising unemployment, measures to augment the employability programmes operated by the Council's Employment & Training Unit have been supported and are being delivered to support front line employability initiatives. Tier 4 national lockdown restrictions have impacted on rollout of this support as many employers have been required to close impacting on ability to benefit from support however engagement activity and positive placements have continued to be promoted and delivered.

7.7 Additional support to Falkirk Towns Ltd through the Economic Recovery Plan has enabled additional support to extended to district shopping centres and businesses including promotional photo opportunities and videos through Shop Local campaign. This resource enables Falkirk Towns Ltd to extend support for business resilience,

community well-being and environmental improvement activities to contribute to the strength, vitality and performance in the district centres in addition to ongoing support in Falkirk town centre. Falkirk Towns Ltd have also supported an increased digital presence for district centre retailers. with direct support in moving to digital trading.

- 7.8 The pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism sector. The latest STEAM results show that visitor numbers declined by 79.8% between 2019 and 2020. This resulted in a 76.1% drop in visitor spend and 57.8% drop in tourism sector employment. The VisitFalkirk Partnership, supported by Council staff, undertook a comprehensive range of activities to promote the area for visitors and to assist the local tourism sector, supplying access to grant support and materials to aid re-opening of attractions and businesses following lockdown measures being lifted.

8. Falkirk Community Trust

- 8.1 FCT closed all of its services on Friday the 20th of March 2020 in anticipation of the national lockdown on the 23rd of March 2020. Almost all FCT staff were placed on furlough after consultation with the relevant unions and Council. A skeleton number of staff were retained for operational reasons and senior management worked from home to continue to manage the situation.

Immediate Support

- 8.2 The four strategic parks, i.e. the Helix, Callendar Park, Muiravonside Country Park and Kinneil Estate remained open to help support the Government's wishes that local communities were able to undertake a short period of exercise in an open air environment and within a short distance from their homes. The staff who operate these sites continued to work through the lockdown period and manage the customer visits as best as they could throughout that period, often in difficult circumstances.
- 8.3 Bo'ness Town Hall also remained 'open' to a local voluntary group who wished to operate a food distribution service and with the support of Trust staff, were able to have the facility act as a store and effectively a distribution centre for the benefit of the more vulnerable in the Bo'ness Community. This operated from 27th March 2020 to 6th August 2020.

Flu Vaccination Centres

- 8.4 Arrangements were put in place to have the three Town Halls; Falkirk Town Hall (FTH), Grangemouth Town Hall (GTH) and Bo'ness Town Hall (BTH) open for the purpose of providing 'flu vaccination centres', as the future access to such sites by customers was unknown, however the larger sport sites had an expectation of a return to full operation before the three town halls, so these were not suggested or in fact requested at the time by the NHS as they were believed to be too large in any case
- 8.5 Much preparation and planning was required by both Trust and NHS staff to deliver a vaccination centre for those over 50 years of age, the elderly and the vulnerable, out-with the more usual clinical environment and in the midst of a COVID pandemic with the associated restrictions. Some Trust staff were brought back from 'furlough' to prepare and operate the facilities. Risk assessments were completed in partnership with the NHS and effective joint operational tasks were provided by the NHS and the Trust that delivered the flu vaccination centres

COVID Vaccination Centres

- 8.6 As a result of the success of the operation of the flu vaccination centres, the NHS requested that the same three sites be used on a similar basis for COVID vaccination purposes. Similar to the arrangements put in place for the operation of the flu vaccination centres, staff were brought back from furlough and provided with the necessary training in accordance with the completed risk assessments.
- 8.7 As the Government recognised the need to vaccinate more people quicker, Falkirk's Forth Valley College Campus was established as a larger scale facility that could also be utilised as an additional vaccination centre to the area. However, the need of the NHS to provide sufficient levels of staff at relatively short notice presented them with a challenge that the Trust were able to meet in the provision of staff as 'marshals' throughout the 12 hour day operation on a 7 day a week basis.

- 8.8 On this occasion, the Trust approached its front-line staff who were on furlough, asking for their support in undertaking the task of marshals. Approximately 40 staff came forward to help and their support has been much appreciated by all who have attended the centre and the NHS medical staff alike.
- 8.9 Marshals provided support to the NHS at the College site from the 1st of February until the 18th of April, at which time the NHS were in a position to take-over these duties. This allowed Trust staff to either return to furlough or return to their normal places of work, as a significant number of Trust services were scheduled to re-open from week beginning the 26th of April.

Mobile Testing Units

- 8.10 The NHS introduced 'Mobile Testing Units' (MTUs) throughout the wider area. A number of requests for the establishment of these sites were made of the Trust and at very short notice (one to two days maximum). The MTUs were set up in the facility car parks and staffed by NHS paramedics. Access to the facilities was provided to the MTU staff to ensure their general welfare throughout the long hours of their operation.

Fixed Asymptomatic Test Site at Polmont SC

- 8.11 The Trust made Polmont Sports Centre available to the NHS, for the provision of a test site that could be visited by the local community in Falkirk. Such a site would act as a 'drop-in' centre to anyone who wished to be tested, even though they were not displaying symptoms. Upon inspection by military personnel, who by this time were providing support for the Forth Valley NHS, deemed it appropriate for use. The facility was set up and operated by military personnel within a week's notice and from the 24th March. Only Trust staff now operate this AST on behalf of the NHS, with an expected closure date of the 23rd of May.

Staff Support and implications

- 8.12 Almost all front line Trust staff were on furlough at the time of the initial requests for support in August last year, so arrangements were required to bring appropriate members of staff back from furlough, to undertake different work for the Trust than they were certainly used to, to help support the NHS in all of their requests throughout the period of the pandemic.
- 8.13 Understandably, the staff were initially cautious about supporting the variety of requests being made of them and almost always at very short notice. However, Trust staff have generally been magnificent in their positive responses to requests for support and indeed in how they have delivered such a level of customer service in what was often a stressful environment for the elderly and vulnerable in the community.
- 8.14 FCT staff continued to be paid their full salary, whether they were on furlough or working in a support capacity in support for the NHS, so there was no financial incentive for any member of staff to step forward and help deliver the services described above. However, many staff did just that and FCT is very proud of this selfless act from so many members of staff at such a difficult time for the country and indeed given their own personal and family circumstances.
- 8.15 Many FCT staff had previously expressed their wish to 'volunteer' for the Council,

whilst on furlough, however this was not legally possible as this may have been seen as the Council providing services whilst being funded by the Government's Job Retention Scheme, which was not the purpose of the scheme. So, many FCT staff were able to support the NHS, but whilst still being employed and paid by FCT.

- 8.16 Two members of Trust staff also undertook a 'Digital Champions' role over a three-month period, in support of the Council's Social Work Adult Services team. Their role helped to provide much needed contact between social service professionals and their more vulnerable clients and was much appreciated by Council staff.
- 8.17 More recently a member of FCT's Events Team has been seconded to the Council's Resilience Team to help deliver the ongoing COVID related services that continue to be required.

Financial Implications

- 8.18 At an early stage of the NHS requests for support, it was made clear that as there would be a cost to FCT to have their staff return from furlough, any request of the NHS for services/facilities would need to be paid for and this was acknowledged and accepted by senior NHS staff.
- 8.19 The costs of the town halls were based on the cheapest community rate, less a significant discount, so that the costs incurred by FCT would be fully recovered. The charges did not seek to generate financial gain and had to remain affordable to the NHS

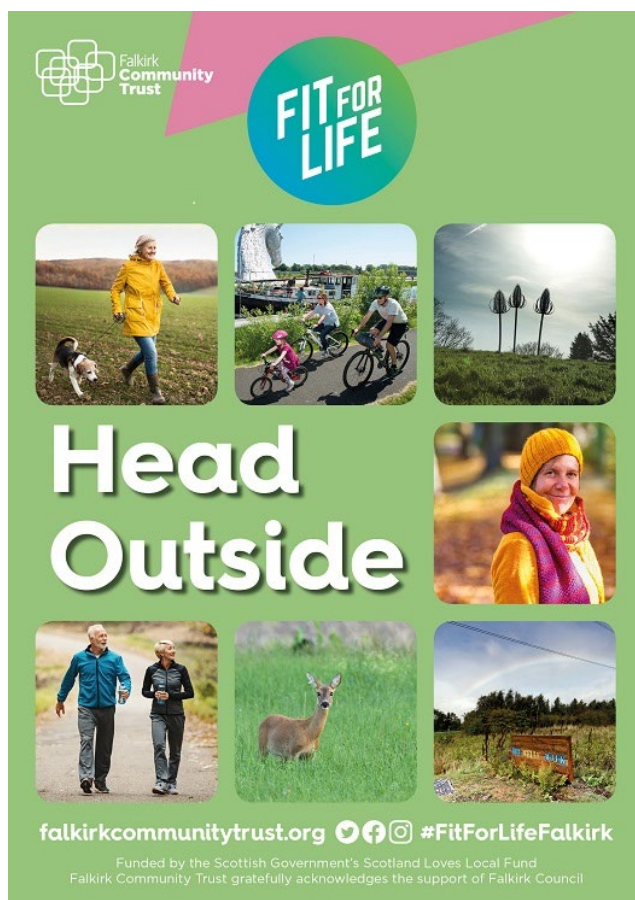
Re-opening of Services and Facilities

- 8.20 The first re-opening of FCT operated services in 2020 was undertaken on a phased approach that had been agreed by the Council and on their priority basis. Some of those agreed dates were however not achieved as a result of the Council being unable to approve access until completion of building related checks.
- 8.21 Given the variety of services provided by FCT, many sites and services have been opened and subsequently closed, or partly re-opened, whilst some remain closed since the first lockdown in 2020. FCT has followed the Government's guidelines at all times. At the current time of writing Falkirk being in 'Level 2' allows for most FCT services being re-opened however access remains constrained by factors such as the reduction in capacity levels, improved ventilation being required in some areas, some particular areas not able to be open, e.g. softplay, and saunas, so it has been a confusing picture for customers and indeed staff.
- 8.22 There has been a significant demand for FCT services, especially as services are re-opening for the second time, however the need to book for almost every activity has most certainly impacted on the customers' experience as they are no longer able to simply turn up and participate.
- 8.23 A safe and hygienic environment is currently being provided within the facilities with enhanced cleaning and monitoring regimes in place.
- 8.24 The vast majority of FCT staff have now returned from furlough and have been integrated back into the workplace with all appropriate training taking place to ensure they are able to engage with customers once again. Comprehensive Risk

Assessments have also been carried out at all facilities and activities to ensure appropriate compliance with relevant health, safety guidelines.

Marketing

- 8.25 FCT's online presence and the need to provide additional information and indeed positive motivational messages to the community and staff members alike was significantly increased with the website being the main hub of information and links.
- 8.26 The Helix's Facebook page alone reached over 693,000 people. A specific 'FitForLife: Head Outside' campaign was created and acted as a theme to support the local community stay physically and mentally healthy. The annual Hippfest Silent Film Festival, that had been cancelled in March 2020, returned in March 2021, despite the closure of the Bo'ness Hippodrome with the whole programme being delivered digitally and having a new a world-wide reach.



Conclusions

- 8.27 In summary, FCT reacted quickly and effectively to close services at the first lockdown in March 2020. The four strategic parks have remained open throughout the period of the pandemic to ensure opportunities were provided for the local community to undertake their allowed periods of exercise, in an open air and local environment.
- 8.28 Support to the NHS was provided wherever and whenever requested to accommodate their logistical operation of vaccination centres, MTUs and the fixed ATS facility. Feedback from visitors and the NHS has been very positive for the support provided to them.

- 8.29 FCT re-opened services and facilities when it was deemed safe to do so and in accordance with the Government's guidelines and on a phased approach agreed with the Council. However, some facilities remain closed until such times as further easing of the restrictions are announced. FCT continue to plan to re-open these services as soon as permitted.
- 8.30 FCT continue to be vigilant and will take all due care during the coming months as visitor numbers increase at all FCT facilities to ensure safe and welcoming environments are provided for customers.

9. Development Services

Waste Update

- 9.1 Waste services managed to keep statutory services running thorough out the various lockdowns over the last year and in fact were one of the first councils to get all waste services back up and running. During that time, we have managed a 50% increase in traffic volume at our Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC). Last year in total 250,000 vehicles visited our two sites and they were closed for two months. In terms of bulky uplifts, we also completed 9000 more jobs than the previous year. Together with an increase in total waste arisings collected of more than 5000 tonnes. This has all been done with the cooperation of staff who have worked tirelessly in testing circumstances whilst observing social distancing rules.
- 9.2 During this time, we have also introduced an e booking system for vans at the HWRC, work collaboratively with neighbouring councils on a residual waste treatment contract for the biodegradable landfill ban in 2025 and developed and had approved a new Litter Strategy and Action Plan.

Environmental Health & Trading Standards

- 9.3 Throughout the pandemic Environmental Health & Trading Standards has worked with businesses and other Council partners to ensure compliance with COVID-19 legislation and guidance. The intention was to assist businesses to keep their customers and staff safe using the first 3 of the 4 Es (engage, explain, encourage) and only enforcing where necessary. This has involved regular communication and proactive visits to help the businesses comply from the onset.
- 9.4 Website information was prepared and regularly updated so that the public and businesses had easy access to helpful information. We sent Emails to businesses to provide key information at various stages of the pandemic.
- 9.5 EH&TS worked closely with colleagues at Business Gateway/Economic Development, Licensing and Falkirk Bid to ensure information was circulated through e-zines, newsletters and the various social media channels. Officers carried out joint proactive visits with the police at re-opening of various sectors to ensure businesses were fully aware of the requirements. Officers responded to nearly 2500 Covid related service requests promptly. Officers also carried out joint visits of hospitality businesses with Police Scotland at weekends to ensure compliance. The vast majority of businesses were found to be compliant. Officers attend the COVID-19 Town Centre Working Group, working collaboratively to assist businesses adapt during the pandemic. There is very strong partnership working between our Town Centre EHO and Falkirk Bid Manager. Officers have attended all Problem Assessment Groups (PAG) /Incident Management Teams (IMTs) with NHSFV to assist businesses bring outbreaks under control.
- 9.6 To ensure consistency with other Local Authorities there has been regular contact with the Scottish Environmental Health & Trading Standards COVID-19 Group. In addition, there is regular communication/partnership working with colleagues in the Local Resilience partnership i.e. NHSFV, Police, Stirling Council and Clackmannanshire Council.

Roads and Grounds

- 9.7 Roads Services undertook work to maintain the local road network to ensure that it was safe and serviceable for travellers during lockdown, taking cognisance of the increase in home shopping deliveries and the needs of emergency services.
- 9.8 Out of hours emergency response continued throughout the period to ensure dynamic response could be provided for flooding and other roads emergencies. The storm event in August 2020 and the resultant flooding issues that emanated from this were resourced in line with Covid protocols
- 9.9 Roads winter response was adapted and resourced to target routes to hospitals and vaccination centres. An additional network of footways were treated to allow for physical exercise during lockdown and this addressed concerns in relation to increased pressure on hospitals from accidents from falls and resultant broken bones.
- 9.10 Grounds teams also responded to the requirement for our parks and open space areas to be available and suitable for public exercise during lockdown by increasing the work that is normally done in these areas.

Planning

- 9.11 Throughout the pandemic officers have continued to support the development industry by continuing to process planning applications and building warrants as well as fulfilling its on call emergency duty service associated with the reporting of dangerous buildings and structures. The Local Development Plan 2 was finalised for adoption at the Council's June 2020 meeting and a series of Supplementary Guidance documents produced.



- 9.12 The working arrangements of staff during the pandemic resulted in the electronic submission of both planning applications and building warrants through utilisation of the E development portal. This has been embraced by our customers and it is now expected to be the predominant method for submission of warrants and planning applications as we move forward, supporting our own innovative digital aspirations as a council as well as those of the Scottish Government.
- 9.13 The determination of planning applications required to be determined by planning Committee has continued throughout the pandemic by moving to virtual meetings. In particular the construction industry has continued to operate throughout the majority of the pandemic and officers have utilised innovative alternative digital solutions to

attending site visits in person wherever possible to ensure Falkirk remains “open for business “.

- 9.13 Officers have also attended the COVID-19 Town Centre Working Group, working collaboratively to assist businesses adapt during the pandemic and ensuring strong partnership working is maintained.

10. Covid-19 - Lessons Learned

- 10.1 It is important that the experiences from handling the pandemic and lessons learned are taken into account to inform business continuity plans and the assessments of risk from future events that may face the Council. In the early period of the pandemic, a series of business continuity plans were enacted and steps taken to implement these to enable essential services to be maintained while enabling business as usual activities to proceed with home working and social distancing measures in place.

Business Continuity - Debriefs

- 10.2 All Services in Falkirk Council, including Falkirk Community Trust and the Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership (including one care home and a supported housing complex) have had interim Structured Debriefs carried out in respect of how the Service reacted to the initial outbreak of Covid-19. Each Service was provided with recommendations to consider as well as lessons learned and good practice. Overall the debriefs were found to be very positive with a great deal of examples given of the goodwill, initiative and cross service working that has typified the Council's response. Amongst the key lessons learned were:

- the need for clear methods of command, control & communication across the strategic (CMT), tactical (Service) and operational (units and teams) levels of resilience support, involving co-opted advisors as necessary
- decision logs should be maintained to capture key decisions being made and actions required. These logs should be reviewed regularly.
- ensure parity of communication between staff working at home, in offices or deployed in operational settings
- review authoring rights to the Council website to enhance capacity for update
- to consider a review of work/life balance supporting mental health issues and addressing issues arising from staff working from home
- to review the approach to the engagement of volunteers, mapping as necessary to job profiles
- identify staff who have skills where they could assist colleagues in the continued delivery of critical functions.
- enhance the provision of ICT support to enable mobile & flexible working
- update business continuity plans in light of lessons learned from the debriefing following the pandemic.

- 10.3 The debriefs were then translated to action plans for each Service and the common or corporate recommendations were developed into a corporate action plan. This plan was agreed by the CMT in February 2021. Further debriefs will be carried out as required, further highlighting and developing the good practice and lessons learned and assisting with the recovery plans.

Corporate Risk – Deep Dives

- 10.4 The Council's Corporate Risk Management Group met regularly through this period and, as agreed by the Executive conducted a series of 'deep dive' exercise on key areas of work relating to the effects of the pandemic:

- Resilience

- Water Quality in operational buildings

The results of this work and the actions being taken forward as a consequence of the assessments is summarised in the Appendices attached to this report.

- 10.5 CMT considered a Corporate Risk Review / Draft Committee Deep Dive on 01 February 2021, and agreed the key lessons and actions summarised below and at Appendices 1-2. The Scrutiny Committee's role is to consider these and seek further assurance on the lessons, progress and actions, and make any recommendations to the Executive (if appropriate).
- 10.6 Services are actively responding to COVID-19 at the present time with Business Continuity Plans enacted to manage the response. While capacity is significantly stretched the winter period challenging measures are being taken to understand the impacts that COVID has had on local communities and lessons learned from the measures the Council has implemented. While business continuity planning has proven robust and helpful it is recognised that this could not have fully anticipated or addressed all COVID-19 risks.

Resilience Risks (Appendix 1)

- 10.7 An appraisal of resilience risks has been undertaken and the Appendices attached summarise the progress of debriefing work in relation to COVID Improvement Actions.

Table 1.1: Corporate Risk Review: COVID-19 Resilience Dashboard

- 10.8 This page summarises progress in COVID-19 Debrief Action Plans. Debriefs have been completed at a Corporate level, and for individual Services. In addition, further work is taking place to ensure that action plans address critical functions and that all Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) Business Impact Assessments (BIA) are updated.

Table 1.2: Corporate Risk Review: COVID-19 Improvement Plan

- 10.9 This Table summarises the key improvements that are needed to embed BCP policies. The Resilience Team is progressing these actions with Services, and a further CRM review will be undertaken by December 2021. Services will provide assurance through Quarterly Service Assurance Statements and these are monitored by Corporate Risk Management Group and reported to Corporate Management Team as necessary.
- 10.10 A more detailed update by Resilience on the COVID-19 Service Debriefs has also been provided to Scrutiny Committee. CMT has committed to a programme of work to build on these and progress will be reported (alongside Corporate Risk updates) on a six-month basis.

Appendix 2: Water Quality Risks

Table 2.1: Corporate Risk Review: Lessons Learnt on Water Quality

- 10.11 Amongst the lessons learned in relation to COVID-19, the Council has examined its approach to Water Quality and associated building utilities risks. During the initial phase of lockdown the Council's response in this field was directly affected by lockdown restrictions and staff & contractor availability. A report addressing these issues was presented to CMT in August 2020 and an update on the actions relating to this is contained in the Table 2.1.
- 10.12 Not directly related to COVID-19 - there is a need to ensure that Premises Management responsibilities are implemented fully at a service level to ensure compliance with the Premises Manager Handbook. These were shown as increased risks in CRM Updates and Service Assurance Statements during 2019 and action is underway by Services to update their approach to Premises Management having regard to the lessons learned in this field arising from COVID-19.
- 10.13 The Head of Planning & Resources within Children's Services has confirmed that effective ongoing maintenance and testing is now in place at all locations, including the flushing of water systems during lockdown at all Schools and other Public facilities.

Internal Audit – levels of assurance assessment

- 10.14 A report will be presented to the forthcoming Audit Committee on levels of assurance on the Council's arrangements for risk management, governance, and control, based on audit work undertaken during 2020/21. This will include additional details on six additional Covid-19 related audits undertaken by the Internal Audit team.

11. Case Studies

- 11.1 The response to the pandemic highlighted a number of instances where Council staff have acted far beyond what is normally expected of them. They have also tapped into a well of enthusiasm and commitment in our communities, with our partners and amongst local business in ways that have been central to the effectiveness of the response. This resulted in the impacts of the pandemic being mitigated for many across our communities.
- 11.2 A number of case studies have been compiled which demonstrate the good practice which has been evident in recent months. Links to these documents are attached at Appendix 3.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been significant for the Falkirk area. It demanded a concerted approach by the Council to aid the response and recovery efforts. This work is still ongoing. This report demonstrates the significant actions that have been undertaken across the Council to aid the response and prepare for the area's recovery. The actions of the Council's workforces to meet the challenges presented by Covi-19 have been immense and it is important to acknowledge this effort. The debriefing work that has been undertaken indicate that many lessons have been learned (and will continue to be learned) for the area to fully recover.

Appendices













Appendix 1: Corporate Risk Review – Resilience (including COVID-19 Debrief Actions)

Appendix 2: Corporate Risk Review – Water Quality in Council Buildings

Appendix 3 Case Studies

Appendix 1

Table 1.1: Corporate Risk Review – COVID-19 Resilience Dashboard

	Risk Level	Readiness – Assurance Level	Comments COVID-19 Debrief Actions and Business Impact Assessments (BIAs)
Children's Services			COVID-19 Debrief was completed in Jan 2021. The Action Plan is being progressed.
Corporate & Housing Services			CHS SMT review the Debrief Actions Quarterly (next due in Dec 2020). CHS SMT have been asked to review their Debrief Actions and Critical Function BCPs, as part of their Service Assurance Statement review.
Development Services			DS DMT track their COVID-19 Debrief Actions on Pentana. Assurance has been provided that good progress has been made on these. The Resilience Team will monitor the BCP Improvement Actions and give updates to CMT.
Social Work Adult Services / IJB			IJB Strategic Risk Register (SRR) includes actions a risk resilience and actions. This was reviewed by the HSCP Leadership Team in November 2020. The risk is rated as High on the IJB SRR, but Medium on the Corporate Risk Register. A Debrief has been undertake in by an interim advisor. A Care Homes Dashboard has been developed. This includes a BIA. This provides SWAS, IJB, and the Care Inspectorate with assurance and forecasting on BCP readiness and COVID-19 impact.
Partnerships			
Community Planning Partnership			A Debrief has been undertaken and reported to the Executive (alongside a review of Community Participation). The lessons will be captured in CHS Debrief Actions.
Resilience Team and Resilience Partnership			Resilience Team provided lessons to the Regional & Scottish Resilience Partnerships. There have also been a series of work-streams on lessons learnt nationally. The Resilience Team are reviewing the Council's Pandemic Flu Framework. The Resilience Team maintain a COVID-19 Actions Log. As noted at Appendix 1.2, they plan to refresh this and incorporate relevant actions. It is essential that this work is completed at Local and National levels, e.g. in preparation for a Public Inquiry and given past scrutiny of Pandemic Flu exercises.

Readiness – Assurance Level

Establishing

Plans <50% complete

No Assurance



Developing

Plans >50% complete

Limited Assurance



Ready

Plans 100% complete

Substantial Assurance



*Readiness means that – all BC & Recovery Plans are documented. And they reflect all lessons from COVID-19 and previous events & exercise have been captured and Debrief Actions completed. Plans tested (if necessary). Must include BCPs for High Risk Functions on the BIA.

Readiness is expected to be Developing throughout COVID-19 given the level of uncertainty. It should increase as Debrief Actions are implemented.

Table 1.2 Corporate Risk Review – COVID-19 Resilience - Key Lessons and Improvement Actions

This is based on a review of the Key Controls and Review Mechanisms in the Corporate Risk Register.

1	Business Continuity Plans and Exercises	<p>The Corporate BCM Policy was agreed by CRMG and CMT in 2018, and then cascaded to Chief Officers. It gives a broad framework and the principle are sound, although It may not have been applied fully during COVID-19. BCM Training was provided to Senior Managers and the Incident Management Team.</p> <p>Services have adopted a number of BCP documents. There is a need for improved a Corporate BIA and BCP Overview although it's also recognised that there will always be good reasons to apply BCPs flexibly within Services.</p> <p>Corporate BCP Exercises were put on hold because COVID-19 is a live exercise. This meets Civil Contingencies Act Duties - But the need for BCP Exercises goes beyond Statutory compliance – it is good management and protects Services.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Services and Resilience Team need to restart exercises as soon as possible. - CRMG need to review lessons, - CMT to receive updates on business continuity and service assurance. <p>Corporate BCM Policy need to be reviewed – including roles, assurance framework, and (where necessary) BCP Training. Corporate BCP Templates / Service BCPs need to be more focussed on recovery of Critical Functions v contact lists. Corporate Systems need to be used as a 'key source of truth' for BCPs and maintained by Services, e.g. Resource-link.</p> <p>The Resilience Team will also consider how to monitor the BCP Improvement Actions., and monitor / provide assurance on BCP Readiness at Council and Partnership level (in addition to Quarterly Service Assurance Statements).</p>
2	Business Impact Analysis (BIA)	<p>The Pandemic Flu Plan / Framework was last updated in 2009. This was recognised as a critical document in previous planning. The Resilience Team started to update this in early 2020 but it wasn't completed as COVID-19 Response took over. The main impact of this was that there no complete list of Critical Functions - or Business Impact Analysis (BIA). This work has now been implemented across the Council.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <p>Most Services now have a BIA, in some form. These need to be consolidated into a Corporate BIA and agreed by CMT. This document is essential - at the start of any emergency - to assist with allocation of resources. Also, it needs to be maintained during emergencies to help with tracking readiness, response, and forecasting including e.g. PPE and Staff.</p> <p>This work is essential, e.g. in preparation for e.g. public inquiry and earlier scrutiny of pandemic flu exercises.</p>
3	Resilience Actions	<p>The Risk Preparedness Assessment needs to be tracked on Pentana. CMT and Executive need to agree and scrutinise it.</p> <p>The Resilience Team plan to restart the current COVID-19 Actions Log and to email it to Services for monthly updates.</p> <p>CMT is currently receiving regular updates on the Covid-19 situation.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <p>A process needs to be developed for reporting Resilience Actions and (where necessary) escalation to CMT.</p>
Root Causes and Next Steps		
4	Root Causes for Executive Deep Dive	<p>This is a really difficult assessment to make given how complex COVID-19 has been and the exceptional level of effort that has gone into the response at all levels. Key themes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Continuity was not sufficiently prioritised before COVID-19; - Resilience Team to provide corporate oversight and regular assurance reports to CMT and Members; and - Resilience Actions to be measurable, monitored, and (if necessary) escalated.
	Next Steps	The CRM Group to monitor progress and provide regular assurance to CMT and the Executive.

Table 2.1: Corporate Risk Review - Water Quality – Improvement Actions

Ref	Action	Progress / Latest Notes	Owner (Team)	Original Due Date	Status	Revised Date
Strategic Actions - Facilities and Health & Safety Teams						
1	Arrange updated risk assessments	A contractor has now been appointed (HBE Ltd) to undertake a wholesale review and replacement of RA's. There is now an ongoing programme of legionella risk assessment work. Work started in April '21. Schools and care homes being dealt with first.	Facilities	31 Aug 2020		31 March 2022
2	Capture remedial actions / recommendations in both ASSURE & PROFESS systems	Facilities Team advise 50% progress has been made. Water test results and remedial actions being captured in PROFESS. Corporate H&S team to embed within ASSURE. This work is ongoing as risk assessments come back from HBE. BDU are reviewing identified risks and creating Action Plans.	Health & Safety	31 Mar 2021		No Change
3	Ensure update reviews scheduled every 2 years	Progress dependant on Action 1. Once Risk Assessments are revised, reviews will be scheduled every 2 years. Next review is included as part of this contract with HBE	Facilities	31 Mar 2021		31 March 2022
4	Remedial Works – Make arrangements to enable any alterations to water system infrastructure	Priority Sites - Complete – those sites which Facilities Team have been asked to prepare for opening have had water tests undertaken with satisfactory results, with remedial works completed if required.	Facilities	31 Aug 2020		31 Dec 2020
		Non Priority Sites – those with no re-opening date / plan will be longer. Facilities need at least 1 month lead time to complete a test and works, once asked to prepare to open	Facilities / Services	31 Aug 2020		+ 1 Month Minimum
5	Water quality in buildings policy to be reviewed	Lead Officer confirmed it will be completed end Jan 2021 and will then be formally approved by CMT.	Health & Safety	30 Sept 2020	Complete	31 Jan 2021
6	Premises Manager handbook to be reviewed	Lead Officer confirmed that it was completed in Jan 2021. Also, further changes may be needed after the new contractor is appointed and they provide training.	Health & Safety	30 Sept 2020	Complete	31 Jan 2021
Operational Actions – Service Management Teams						
7	All relevant premises to have a designated Premises Manager at all times	All Chief Officers to confirm that all relevant premises have a designated Premises Manager at all times. Update supplied to CMT Feb 2021	All Chief Officers	30 Sept 2021		No Change
8	All Premises Managers (or delegates) to undergo appropriate training .	PMs currently receive initial training and the Facilities Team provide ad hoc advice to PMs, if requested. The new contractor will also provide additional training. Training requirement to be captured in APDS records. Contract with HBE in place for OLLE type training including Janitors & Caretakers. Organisation of training is with Corp H&S team	All Chief Officers	31 Dec 2020		30 June 2021
Key						
	No assurance – Significantly Overdue		Limited Assurance – Overdue		Substantial Assurance Completed or On Progress	More Info Needed / Not Yet Started

Table 2.2: Corporate Risk Review - Water Quality – Lessons Learnt and Root Causes

Ref	Issue	Brief Description of Progress, Issues, and Root Causes
Lesson Directly Related to COVID-19		
1	Water Quality Action Plan	<p>There has been progress, but affected by lockdown measures. Revised dates identified.</p> <p>CMT should ensure all revised dates are achievable, and track actions. Progress, or any further delay, should be included in updates to Executive.</p> <p>A long-term vacancy in Facilities Team filled. This indirectly delayed training, Risk assessments and contracts were in place and Facilities Team provided ad hoc support.</p> <p>Root Causes: Original timescales were not achievable. Risk appetite was not clear. Need for CMT scrutiny.</p>
Lessons – But not directly related to COVID-19		
2	Premises Management Arrangements	<p>Many of the current actions were identified in the 2009 Internal Audit review of Legionella Arrangements. While Facilities Team did undertake actions following this, the Annual Premises Managers' Handbook Reports to CRMG over many years, continued to identify recurring issues in systems, guidance, compliance, etc.</p> <p>The ongoing issues were well documented in CRMG papers and minutes..</p> <p>There is also a risk that recently agreed actions are not a permanent solution. CMT should seek further assurance from the Lead Officer on whether revised actions and timescales are deliverable, and if the PMH process is fit for purpose.</p> <p>Root Causes: Failure to fully address recurring PMH issues and lack of scrutiny other than via CRMG.</p>
3	Health & Safety Risks	<p>CMT were advised by CRMG in November 2019 that Health & Safety risks had been increased to High, partly due to Premises Management issues.</p> <p>Additional Safety actions were also added to all Services' Assurance Statements. Most are outstanding and have no updates.</p> <p>It is not clear from CMT Minutes what follow up actions were taken. This should be standard on all risks escalated to High.</p> <p>The risk was rated as High on the CRM Dashboards in June 2020 (Executive) and Nov 2020 (Audit Committee).</p> <p>In addition, CRM Dashboards did advise Members of limited progress on Services' Assurance Statements in 2019 and 2020.</p> <p>Root Causes: Failure to fully undertake Premises Management responsibilities at a service level and a need for closer regular monitoring to ensure compliance with the Premises Manager Handbook. The monitoring is done through the assurance and scrutiny processes mentioned above – including Service Assurance Statements (which SMTs should review Quarterly) and CRM Dashboard – including in CRM Updates to CRMG (Quarterly) and Audit Committee and Executive (c. 6 monthly)</p>
4	Business Continuity Plans	<p>The risk of sudden and extended closure of multiple buildings was identified in the Local Resilience Partnership's Risk Preparedness Assessment, albeit the trigger and scale of this risk was unknown. The need to maintain water systems during building closures was also a known risk to Facilities Team. This should have filtered down to Service BCPs and the PMH.</p> <p>Root Causes: Failure to fully assess risks, and to prepare and implement adequate Business Continuity Plans.</p>
5	Corporate Risk Register Details	<p>There is a clear description of the risk, consequences, and controls. But Latest Notes do not reflect recent CMT Updates.</p> <p>Pentana needs to be kept up to date to provide CMT and Members with a reliable 'single source of truth' and baseline for scrutiny.</p> <p>Root Cause: Failure to update Pentana regularly (at least Quarterly).</p>

Case Studies

The following case studies at the links below have been prepared comprising details relating to Council priority, the service aim, what we did, achievements, impact and next steps:

Communities

1. **Governance:** [Sustaining the democratic process](#)
2. **Corporate Plan:** [Setting a new direction for the Council](#)
3. **Support for People:** [Partnership helps ease pandemic pressures](#)
4. **Emergency food:** [Helping to combat food insecurity](#)
5. **Mobilisation Centre:** [Sharing responsibility to sustain services](#)
6. **Rents:** [Reducing tenants' financial worries during the pandemic](#)
7. **Support line:** [Helping families cope during the pandemic](#)
8. **Summer takeaway:** [Combatting learning loss & food poverty](#)
9. **Family learning:** [Supporting learning in Carronshore](#)
10. **Mass fatalities:** [Planning for mass fatalities across Forth Valley](#)
11. **Bereavement:** [Supporting bereaved families during the pandemic](#)
12. **Catering:** [Helping feed children & families during the crisis](#)
13. **Cleaning:** [Enhanced cleaning to stop the spread](#)
14. **Reopening schools:** [Managing the safe reopening of schools & establishments](#)
15. **Mental health:** [Creating a new Service to support young people's mental health & wellbeing](#)
16. **ASN partnerships:** [Supporting children & young people with Additional Support Needs](#)
17. **Employee support:** [Supporting employees through the pandemic – and beyond](#)

Enterprise

18. **Economic Recovery Plan:** [Supporting the local economy to come back stronger](#)
19. **Bereavement:** [Creating a modern Bereavement Service](#)
20. **Business grants:** [Providing a lifeline to local businesses](#)
21. **Business advice:** [Helping businesses stay compliant](#)

Innovation

22. **Telecare:** [Going digital to save lives](#)
23. **Digital learning:** [Connected Falkirk](#)
24. **Persons at Risk Database:** [Saving vulnerable lives in an emergency](#)
25. **Digital exclusion:** [Combatting the growing problem of digital exclusion](#)
26. **Digital processes - Education:** [Improving systems; reducing bureaucracy](#)