

## REPORT TO ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL – 14 JANUARY 2021

### COVID-19 UPDATE

#### 1 Reason for Report / Summary

- 1.1 This report is to provide the Council with an update on the Council's response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and work being done on the recovery.

#### 2 Recommendations

**The Council is recommended to:**

- 2.1 **Note the ongoing response of the Council as a Category 1 Responder under the Civil Contingencies Act and work being done on the Recovery phase.**

#### 3 Purpose and Decision Making Route

- 3.1 This report is coming before the Council as a reflection of the significance of the ongoing response to the pandemic. It is an opportunity for elected members to discuss Aberdeenshire wide ramifications. It is a report for noting and any other necessary decision making in respect of the Council's current activity will follow the Council's agreed delegations in terms of the Scheme of Governance.
- 3.2 Since 30 April 2020, Council have been provided with an update on the COVID-19 pandemic at each of its meetings.
- 3.3 A timeline of key events and milestones in the UK and the Scottish Government response to the emergency since the last COVID-19 update to Council on 19 November 2020 is attached at Appendix 1.

#### 4 Discussion

- 4.1 A verbal report with the most up to date information will be provided at the meeting. Members will wish to note the highlights and focal points of the council efforts in the following key areas:
- 4.2 **COVID-19 IMPACT ON STAFF & SERVICES** – Whereas previously infection rates had not caused significant issues with absence rates of our own staff suffering from the virus or isolating through "test and trace", the second wave is now revealing pockets of higher absence rates from breakouts within our communities and therefore impacting on the availability and wellbeing of our own staff. The new variant being more transmittable creates a new operating environment leading to a review of our Safe Systems of Works (SSoW) to

ensure that they provide appropriate controls to deal with this additional risk. This may involve a tightening up on activities and a more rigid enforcement of the 2m social distancing that had been relaxed in places within guidelines. This may also involve additional compulsory controls, such as wearing of face coverings, and open vehicle windows for example, to further minimise risk. That will place significant demand on vehicles and may limit operational flexibility further and demand redesign of activities to reflect the need for more stringent controls. Health & Social Care colleagues have throughout the pandemic experienced a high level of demand. This has continued and as demand has increased with increased prevalence of Covid in past few weeks, increased support has been sought from throughout the Council to assist meeting this demand. It has been necessary to fully utilise all avenues to prioritise services and mobilise staff to the areas of most need to protect critical services.

4.3 SERVICE PRIORITISATION – Competing demands for council staff and resources has been a particularly challenging feature of the second wave of infection. Covid-safe service delivery of itself is more resource intensive. Communities have been eager to see the fullest resumption of council provided services and facilities since the period of the first lockdown last year. In addition, calls for mutual aid and public sector collaboration particularly with health colleagues has created extraordinary demands on council staff. Technology was developed to allow the swift mobilisation of staff to areas of need. A process for the prioritisation of services was developed in order that all council activity could be ranked so as to protect the critical activities that the Council is obliged to deliver. The Ranked Activity Matrix – a document which categorises activity from red (critical), amber (business continuity), green (other activity) to blue (suspended) – has been compiled to enable the council to divert resources efficiently and swiftly to meet demand. Some of the areas of unprecedented pressure are:

- Humanitarian Assistance Centre – call handlers and resource allocators
- Contact Centre – customer service advisors
- Vaccination Helpline – call handlers and admin support
- Care Home staffing
- Community Testing Programme
- Roads & Waste operative seasonal requirements
- Support to Public Health lead IMTs
- Corporate Communications – internal and external messaging

4.4 VIRUS SUPPRESSION – Whilst originally in Tier 2, rates of infection, positive tests and the basket of indicators considered nationally to determine the level of restrictions locally were the subject of intense scrutiny culminating in determined efforts to avoid the virus spreading in the second wave. Working together with NHS and Public Health colleagues, intensive efforts were focused on suppression of the virus in Aberdeenshire combining both practical interventions, communications and messaging in order to do all possible to control the surge of rates of infection in our area. An officer Surge

Coordination Group was formed, chaired by the Chief Executive, and involving cross sector and cross council representation. The group continues to meet twice weekly to consider the latest data and trends explained by Public Health experts and focusses on what can be done to impact on those trends. Activity includes:

- Local Outbreak Teams formed for Care Home outbreaks
- Fish and Food Processing Sector close liaison
- Business Community engagement
- Targeted Communications

4.5 VACCINATION PROGRAMME – in the largest scale immunisation programme in UK’s history, the programme began at the beginning of December with Vaccinators, Health & Social Care workers and residents in care homes the first to receive vaccinations in the national roll-out. Locally this has meant a mammoth effort to coordinate the vaccinations as efficiently, safely and swiftly as allocations of supply of the vaccine allow. Council teams are providing a range of support to health colleagues. This involves:

- Appointment of a core team of programme managers and support staff
- Identification of suitable public buildings for vaccination clinics, storage and transport to support activity.
- Vaccination Helpline being established & staffed to provide admin and telephony support from February
- Staffing to support vaccination clinics

4.6 STAY AT HOME RESTRICTIONS/IMPACT – the most recently imposed regulations require that the public stay at home, unless it is necessary to travel for a variety of exceptional reasons – essential work that cannot be done from home; essential shopping and healthcare; caring for the vulnerable etc. will impact upon our communities further. Key challenges & aspects for consideration will be:

- Education – online provision and key worker child care provisions
- Shielding increased reliance on public services
- Loneliness & Mental Health & Wellbeing
- Business Support – coordination of grant support etc
- Staff mobilisation to protect critical services
- Demand on the assistance centre and the capacity and resilience of our volunteer network to continue to provide critical support in our communities

4.7 RECOVERY – “Living with COVID-19” continues to be the focus of activity, centering around Incident Recovery (bringing back services; supporting businesses; encouraging community resilience; controlling finances). The time has still not arrived for longer term transformative recovery work, indeed, the balance between Response and Recovery in the past two months has tipped very definitely more toward Response as suppression of the virus in the second wave has preoccupied quite properly the council and health

colleagues. The Council's Recovery Strategy – a document approved by Council with an Action Plan monitored by the Recovery Reference Group, demonstrates good progress toward an intended Recovery Programme in the fullness of time.

## 5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

5.1 All six of the Council's priorities are engaged in this report as the response to the pandemic reaches all parts of society and all parts of the Council's activities.

5.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial			X
Staffing			X
Equalities			X
Fairer Scotland Duty			X
Town Centre First			X
Sustainability			X
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing			X

5.3 An equality impact assessment is not required because Full Council is being asked to consider and note the update on the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report will not therefore have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics. Any future reports requiring substantive decisions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic will be subject to equality impact assessments where required.

5.4 There are no staffing or financial implications directly arising from the recommendations in this report. The staffing impacts of the pandemic are reflected in the body of the report and the financial impact of actions taken to date in response to the COVID-19 pandemic will be reported to Full Council in due course as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. In addition to this, significant financial resources were distributed from the Scottish Government to the Council in order to support local businesses, the self-employed and residents. The Council's response requires resources and appropriate governance in order to manage these public funds appropriately whilst issuing them promptly. In order to ensure that the Council's overall financial position is supported through this pandemic, dialogue continues with the Scottish Government to secure not only resources but also the assurance that additional expenditure will be covered. All expenditure and lost income related to the COVID-19 pandemic is being captured and collated to establish

the direct financial implications. This information will be shared with Council and will also be included in a regular return to the Scottish Government.

- 5.5 There is no direct impact on sustainability arising from the recommendations in this report. However, there has been a positive impact on sustainability through the increase in Council officers working from home and the move to remote Committee meetings, the outcome of which has been a subsequent reduction in business travel across the local authority area. Reduced access to Council buildings has also resulted in increased use of electronic documents where it has not been possible to obtain a paper copy.
- 5.6 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:
- **ACORP001 – Budget Pressures**
  - **ACORP002– Changes in government policy, legislation and regulation**
  - **ACORP003 – Workforce**
  - **ACORP004 – Business and Organisational Transformation**
  - **ACORP005 – Working with other organisations**
  - **ACORP006 – Reputation Management**
  - **ACORP007 – Social Risk**
  - **ACORP009 – Operational Risk Management (including Health and Safety)**
  - **ACORP010 – Environmental Challenges**

## **6 Scheme of Governance**

- 6.1 The Head of Finance and The Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.
- 6.2 Full Council is able to consider this item in terms of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as the response to the pandemic applies to all of the Council's activities and the matter under consideration is not therefore delegated to any of the Council's appointed Committees. Where substantive decisions are required as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic these will be reported to the relevant Committee, or to Full Council where appropriate.

6.3/

6.3 In terms of Section C.2.4 of the List of Officer Powers in Part 2B of the Scheme of Governance the Chief Executive has the delegated power to implement the provisions of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the Contingency Planning (Scotland) Regulations 2005.

**Jim Savege**  
**Chief Executive**  
**5 January 2021**

**Report Prepared by:** Karen Wiles, Head of Legal & People

**List of Appendices** - Appendix 1 – Timeline and Key Milestones of the COVID-19 Pandemic

## **Appendix 1 – Timeline and Key Milestones of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

7 May – Scottish Government extend the lockdown in Scotland for another 3 weeks

18 May – First Minister of Scotland sets out plans to begin easing Scotland's lockdown restrictions from 28 May

21 May – First Minister of Scotland outlines a four-phase “route map” for easing lockdown restrictions in Scotland that will include allowing people to meet up outside with people from one other household in the first phase. The lockdown will be eased from 28 May subject to the number of new cases of COVID-19 continuing to fall. Schools in Scotland will reopen on 11 August when students would receive a “blended model” of part-time study at school combined with some learning at home.

26 May – The Scottish Government announces plans for Test and Protect, a track and trace system.

28 May – Contact tracing systems go live in Scotland – Test and Protect.

29 May – Lockdown measures are eased in Scotland.

18 June – Scottish Government announces the next phase of easing the lockdown restrictions in Scotland. People living alone or single parents with children can form an “extended group” with one other household from 19 Jun, enabling them to stay overnight, while up to three households can meet up outdoors. Face coverings will become compulsory on public transport from 22 June and most shops were being allowed to reopen from 29 June.

22 June – The wearing of face coverings becomes compulsory on public transport in Scotland with exemptions made for children under five and people with certain medical conditions.

23 June – Scottish Education Minister confirms that schools in Scotland will return full time in August providing the coronavirus continues to be suppressed.

24 June – Scottish Government announces changes to the lockdown restrictions in Scotland including allowing people to meet indoors with two other households from 10 July, and reopening pubs and restaurants, holiday accommodation and hairdressers from 15 July. The two metre social distancing rule stays in place for Scotland.

29 June – Non essential retailers reopen in Scotland.

2 July – Scottish Government announce that the wearing of face coverings will become mandatory in shops in Scotland from 10 July.

3 July – Scotland lifts its five-mile travel restriction.

6 July – Beer gardens and pavement cafes are allowed to reopen in Scotland

9 July – Scottish Government announce that people in Scotland will be able to meet up indoors with two other households from 10 July and also in extended groups outside of up to fifteen from the same day (moved into Phase 3 of the Route Map). Indoor areas of cars & restaurants were to open from 15 July.

15 July – Hairdressers and barbers, pubs and restaurants, cinemas, tourist attractions, places of worship and childcare facilities reopen in Scotland.

16 July – Scottish Government announce changes to lockdown rules from those who are shielding from 17 July. From 17 July they could visit holiday accommodation, as well as outdoor markets and gardens.

30 July – Scottish Government gives schools the go ahead to reopen on 11 August with all pupils expected to be in class full time from 18 August. A provisional date for gyms, swimming pools and indoor sports venues to reopen on 14 September. Also confirmed the shielding programme will be paused on 1 August.

1 August – Shielding programme is paused for Scotland but would continue for the areas where extra precautions have been introduced.

5 August – Lockdown restrictions are reimposed on Aberdeen after a cluster of COVID-19 cases.

10 August – Staff returned to Aberdeenshire schools for in-service training.

12 August – Pupils in Aberdeenshire return to school for the first time since March. Scottish Government announces that lockdown measures will remain in place in Aberdeen.

19 August – Lockdown measures in Aberdeen are extended for a further week.

20 August – Scottish Government announces that gyms, swimming pools and indoor sports courts can reopen from 31 August.

23 August – Lockdown restrictions in Aberdeen are partially lifted with restrictions on travel and a ban on indoor gatherings lifted from 24 August and bars and restaurants allowed to reopen from 26 August.

25 August – Scottish Government announces that school pupils will be required to wear face coverings in school corridors, communal areas and on school buses from Monday 31 August.

28 August - A new law comes into force giving police the power to break up house parties involving more than 15 people.

31 August – face coverings become mandatory for Scottish secondary schools. Gyms, swimming pools and indoor sports courts are permitted to reopen.

1 September – Scottish Government announce that following an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in Glasgow, East Renfrewshire and West Dumbartonshire, additional restrictions will be introduced for people living in these areas for an initial 2-week period.

3 September – Scottish Government announce the resumption of health and wellbeing visits to care homes from 7 September.

10 September – Indoor visits to hospitals and care homes will be limited to essential visits. The NHS Protect Scotland app is launched. The Scottish Government publish an updated route map, limiting indoor and outdoor gatherings to six people from two households, as Scotland remains in Phase 3.

16 September – Data published by the Chief Statistician shows the Scottish Economy contracted by 19.4% during the second quarter of 2020, covering the period April to June. The Scottish Government published a research report exploring the costs of extending the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme on a temporary basis.

20 September – Scottish Government announce £4.25 million extra funding for charities and projects tackling violence against women and girls.

22 September – Scottish Government announce new restrictions on household visits and a national curfew for pubs, bars and restaurant (10pm curfew) that go into effect on Friday 25 September.

24 September – Scottish Government published the Autumn Budget Revision for 2020-21 outlining further funding allocations.

25 September – UK Government publish the Winter Economy Plan, outlining additional support to businesses and workers across the UK.

29 September – Scottish Government publish the State of the Economy Report, summarising recent developments in the global, UK and Scottish economies and providing an analysis of the performance of, and outlook for, the Scottish economy.-

30 September – The Scottish Government announce a new grant to support people on low incomes if they are asked to self-isolate.

2 October – Scottish Government announce a nationwide survey for education staff in schools or early learning centres to help identify the proportion of people working in an education setting who have had COVID-19. The Scottish Government publish the Coronavirus (COVID-19) mental health needs of hospitalised patients report.-

7 October – The Scottish Government announce new temporary measures, including restricting hospitality opening times to 6am – 6pm indoors, with no sales of alcohol. The new restrictions will be backed by a £40 million support fund for business and the existing UK Job Retention Scheme and will be in place nationwide for 16 days.

The Scottish Government announce plans for Higher and Advance Higher exams to go ahead in 2021, while National 5 exams will be replaced by a system where grades are awarded based on coursework and teacher judgement.

8 October – Scottish Government and COSLA agree additional spending powers and funding for councils to address the financial pressures caused by the coronavirus pandemic over the next 2 years. The Scottish Government publish the Mental Health – Transition and Recovery Plan, outlining the Government's response to the mental health impacts of COVID-19.

15 October – First Minister announces that the wearing of face coverings is to become mandatory in workplace canteens from 16 October, and in communal workplace areas, such as corridors and social spaces from 19 October.

20 October – Scottish Government announce further funding for councils to provide free school meals through the winter breaks and additional flexibility to use £20 million, previously held in reserve for the Scottish Welfare Fund, to support people in their communities.

21 October – Scottish Government announce the extension of temporary restrictions until 2 November and additional funding for businesses.-

22 October – Scottish Government announce a £2 million support package for residential outdoor education centres. The UK Government announce increased financial support through the job support and self-employed schemes.

23 October – Scottish Government publish the Five Level Strategic Framework, which indicates different levels of protection that might be needed based on different levels of transmission for the virus. The levels to come into force on 2 November. The Scottish Tourism Recovery Taskforce publish its recommendations for supporting the tourism sector's recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

28 October – Scottish Government announce an NHS Winter Preparedness Plan to support health and care services over the Winter. An Adult Social Care Winter Plan will also be published in early November. Public Health Scotland publish its report on discharged from NHS hospitals to care homes in Scotland.

29 October – Scottish Government announce the new local authority protection measures in force from 2 November (Aberdeenshire falling within Level 2). Face Covering Exemption Cards are launched for people who are unable to wear coverings due to health conditions, disabilities or other special circumstances.

2 November – Pupils in the senior phase of Scottish education (S4-S6) must wear face masks in classrooms in addition to communal areas if the school is in Level 3 or 4.

9 November – First review of the local authority protection measures by the Scottish Government.

16 November – Scottish General Election (Coronavirus) Bill introduced to Scottish Parliament which would allow arrangements to be put in place for the Scottish general election in response to Covid-19. The bill will (amongst other things) change the deadline for postal vote applications to give more time to process an expected high level of requests to vote by post; give the Scottish Ministers power to hold an all-postal election and to hold polling over multiple days, if appropriate; and give a reserve power to the Presiding Officer to postpone the 2021 election by up to 6 months in certain circumstances.

19 November – Statement given by the Health Secretary to Scottish Parliament regarding COVID Vaccine delivery. The priorities for the first wave of vaccine distribution, from December 2020 to February 2021, are front-line health and social care staff; older residents in care homes; care home staff; all those aged 80 and over; unpaid carers and personal assistants; and those delivering the vaccination programme.

20 November – 11 local authority areas move to level 4 and cross-border non-essential travel between Scotland and England is made illegal.

24 November – The 4 United Kingdom nations announce a coordinated plan for Christmas. Three households would be allowed to meet indoors, at a place of worship and outdoor for a space of 5 days (23-27 December) and travel restrictions would be eased.

19 December – Following an outbreak of a new strain of COVID-19 in Wales and South East England, along with seventeen cases of the new strain in Scotland, the coordinated plan for Christmas is cancelled across the United Kingdom. A sole exception is provided for Christmas Day, scrapping the previously planned 5 day relief from travel restrictions. Three weeks of level four restrictions were planned and return to schools postponed to 11 January 2021.

26 December – All of mainland Scotland has Level 4 restrictions applied, including the closure of non-essential retail and hospitality.

4 January 2021 – Statement given by the First Minister to the Scottish Parliament to confirm that the Cabinet decided to introduce from midnight a legal requirement to stay at home except for essential purposes for the duration of January.

5 January – All of mainland Scotland moves from Level 4 to temporary Lockdown, with new guidance published.