

REPORT TO ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL ON 13 JANUARY 2022

COVID19 UPATE

1 Executive Summary/Recommendations

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. 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 and receive up to date information on the impact of the pandemic. It contains an updated 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 18 November 2021 which is attached at **Appendix 1**.

1.2 The Council is recommended to:

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.

2 Decision Making Route

2.1 This item has been considered at each Full Council meeting since 30 April 2020. It is a report for noting only 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 Discussion

3.1 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:

3.2 **IMPACT ON COMMUNITY** - The emergence of the new variant, Omicron in late November 2021 has significantly shifted the national response to the pandemic. With a much higher transmissibility rate the new variant had become the dominant strain in Scotland and the UK by the end of December. Members of the public were asked initially to cancel office Christmas celebrations and then later to restrict their social contacts to three households. New rules were introduced on self-isolation and a new legal duty placed on employers to mitigate against the spread of the virus in workplaces. Homeworking was once again stressed as necessary. Whilst it was stated that no one was being instructed to change their Christmas plans, the public were once again faced with the difficult balance of preserving their wellbeing through the companionship of family and friends with the need to protect their health against spread of the virus. It remained unconfirmed whether the new variant could be

expected to cause less serious illness although a small scale study gives hope for optimism in this regard, but even in the best case scenario of it involving a lower percentage requiring hospital treatment, nevertheless, the sheer number of infections anticipated could indicate the potential for overwhelming the NHS. Emerging into the new year, and with positivity rates at record high levels, the response through self-isolation continues to be a fluid picture with asymptomatic cases who have tested positive on a lateral flow device not required to obtain a PCR. Self-isolation has been reduced to 7 days if the case is vaccinated and boosted and has returned negative LFD tests on the 6th and 7th days. This will aid the ability of people to return to work and ease the workforce pressures which have become evident across all sectors.

The new variant gives us heightened public protection concerns at this stage and this is tackled on a pan-grampian and pan-public service basis through the work of the Chief Officers Group which brings together the leaders of our public sector partners to enable continued delivery of services through a targeted use of data and intelligence.

- 3.3 VIRUS SUPPRESSION – working together with NHS and Public Health colleagues, intensive efforts have been focused on suppression of the virus in Aberdeenshire combining practical interventions, communications, and messaging in order to address the rates of infection in our area. The cross-sector officer Surge Coordination Group which had been meeting fortnightly, increased it's frequency to weekly to monitor the new variant impacts. This group focusses on use of the data to target further interventions including community engagement and communication.

As at 3rd January, in Aberdeenshire, the rate of positivity is rising across all age groups. The rate per 100,000 of population sits at 1,571.9 (this was 282.1 on 6th December). The % positive PCR tests is 26.5% (this was 8.1% on 6th December). This compares with the Scotland wide of rate of 29.1% positive PCR tests. Hospitalisations in Grampian are reflected in the 7 Day running hospital admissions total of 77 (this was 47 on 6th December).

- 3.4 VACCINATION PROGRAMME –with the increase of transmission as a result of the new Omicron variant, the national focus has been on accelerating the booster programme and continuing to ensure that all those eligible receive all doses. As at 4th January 2022, all over 12 years have been offered all three doses. Aberdeenshire continues to perform well compared to the rest of the Scotland with 94.9% receiving the first dose (91.5% for Scotland); 87.9% receiving the second dose (84.2% for Scotland) and 68.6% receiving the booster (62.1% for Scotland).

Efforts continue to promote and encourage take up of the vaccinations for all those eligible.

Activity continues on the relocation programme of vaccination centres to free up community facilities, supported by Live Life Aberdeenshire over the past 12

months. The relocation into new premises is expected to conclude by end of March 2022.

- 3.5 COMMUNITY TESTING – The Council continues to lead the asymptomatic testing programme across Aberdeenshire with supported rapid lateral flow testing and the collection of free home testing kits, available in many towns and villages on a regular basis, continuing through to March 2022. A revised plan is in place for winter months with a focus on offering a home test collect service in as many locations as possible and currently over 20 locations are visited on a weekly basis. In the two weeks leading up to Christmas Eve 2021, over 25,000 test kits were distributed and it is anticipated the high demand for testing access will continue throughout Winter and following the recent change in testing and self-isolation requirements. Observed testing continues to be offered in larger towns. Information on where the testing team will be on a daily basis is available on the council's website ([Community testing - Aberdeenshire Council](#)) and 'myaberdeenshire' app. Community groups, faith centres, halls and retail businesses are also being offered the ability to become collect sites with the Community Testing Team offering regular deliveries/collection points to allow others to distribute home test kits within their community complementing the community testing programme and pharmacy services. Any community group or organisation wishing to get involved can register using this online [form](#).

Symptomatic testing also continues to be available at 8 locations across Aberdeenshire, delivered by the Scottish Government. Aberdeenshire Council facilitates appropriate locations for the mobile testing units on a weekly basis and the testing units are set up and staffed by the Scottish Ambulance Service.

- 3.6 IMPACT ON STAFF – Omicron will have an impact on staff absence and resulting workforce pressures in all sectors of Scotland's workforce including all of our public services partners. Business Continuity and service prioritisation will be key both within the council and working in partnership with colleagues in other public sector bodies. There is activity across all services to refresh business continuity plans in order to be ready to prioritise service delivery & allocation of staff across the public sector where required and where possible.

For the Council, stress remains the top medical reason for staff absence. All sectors of the workforce are enduring workload pressures brought about by additional and seemingly endless covid related activity, ie developing new processes, systems, risk assessments, cleaning, and numerous other work arounds. This has been exacerbated by limited recruitment in many areas due to reduced applicant numbers or vacancy management through workforce planning.

In a context of escalating absence and increased levels of fatigue, the workforce, although still reacting to the pandemic, were asked to step up again and respond to Storm Arwen. Over 600 offers of help from the workforce were received through the corporate mobilisation platform. This was in addition to hundreds of workers doing their job, checking on the vulnerable, clearing roads, inspecting property damage, etc. Our workforce helped our residents by driving

(delivering hot meals, generators, etc), telephone contact, knocking on doors, staffing welfare and rest centres.

The success of the mobilisation system developed for Storm Arwen has allowed for a rapid response to yet again mobilise the workforce to protect life and limb against the risk presented by the omicron variant. With predictions of escalating absence due to transition rates and isolation and in a relatively small window of opportunity the workforce has again begun to be mobilised to provide support in:

- Winter care emergency workforce (target 50 FTE)
- HAC telephone operatives (target 30 FTE)
- Grant administrators (target tbc)

AHSCP are working in partnership with HR to return retired workers, on a voluntary paid basis, into the care sector over winter to protect and support the whole sector. A North East Regional Care Campaign has been developed launching early January to encourage the North East community to choose care as a career and promote the numerous unfilled vacancies across Grampian Health Board, Moray, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.

The emphasis currently being placed on the vital importance of staff welfare and wellbeing cannot be overstated. This remains a regular focus at strategic meetings as well as at a very operational level where wellbeing remains an absolute priority for every line manager. Corporate resources continue to be developed to support those line managers and all Aberdeenshire Council employees. An invigorated package of wellbeing resources and a new platform is under development ready for launching in the new year to provide a “one stop shop” approach for resources to support wellbeing as well as a tailored experience for the individual. Improved corporate wellbeing data which gives a more rounded, real time understanding of wellbeing is being developed so as to allow more targeted interventions. Nevertheless, the focus on daily conversations between supervisors and our people is key to keep a constant monitor on individual circumstances and impact of the virus physically, mentally and psychologically and this continues to be a mainstay of our approach.

- 3.7 IMPACT ON HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE PARTNERSHIP - The AHSCP planned for winter through its Remobilisation Plan 4 (RMP4) and has an escalation plan (G-OPES Plan) which sets out how AHSCP seeks to respond as the level of system escalation increases through mitigating actions.

Coming through the previous cycles of COVID-19 have resulted in increased need and day-to-day service delivery is challenged due to a reduced and exhausted workforce and various limitations for delivery associated with the ongoing presence of the COVID-19 virus. For the HSCP there have been challenges within community settings including care homes, care at home, community teams and community hospitals where staff are exhausted and distressed having cared for very vulnerable people during COVID-19 lockdowns. Services such as Care Management, Mental Health Services and Primary Care are responding to increased needs.

Under the HSCP RMP4 capacity and winter plan the Partnership has:

- Commenced a programme of recruitment of additional health and social care staff
- Increased beds in our community hospitals with surge beds (these rely on derogating both our physical infrastructure and staffing levels)
- Sought to commission care home beds to support discharges however independent providers both care homes and care at home are also fragile in relation to sustainability and only one provider came forward
- Opened an additional 8 beds in our Ythanvale care home
- A Short Life Working Group is in place with Aberdeenshire Council to mobilise additional support for social care
- In partnership with the NHS, Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action (AVA) has recruited a volunteer co-ordinator to identify and match volunteers with patients who need some help to get and stay at home and the HSCP has also commissioned AVA to recruit volunteers to support front line services over the coming months in particular to support staff in care homes and sheltered housing,

In line with the recent letter from the Scottish Government highlighting the threat of Omicron as significant, the HSCP is participating in NHS Grampian planning as well as commencing resilience partnership planning with the Council to:

- Maintain urgent and emergency care to maintain life and limb services
- Maximise capacity in our health and social care system.
- Support our workforce.

3.8 EDUCATION – Updated guidance to enable the safe opening of schools was published on 17th December to be effective from the start of the new term in January 2022 as a response to the concerns about the rising number of Omicron cases. The guidance advocates for a strengthened approach to minimising contacts in schools, particularly through the reintroduction of groupings indoors (bubbles) where this is practicable. Restrictions on school visitors are also tightened, including a return to parent councils and other such groups being precluded from meeting in school buildings. Updated guidance has been issued in relation to ventilation and CO2 monitoring, with new expectations around the monitoring of CO2 levels in all teaching spaces. Schools will also continue to encourage LFD testing among staff and pupils and there is now a strengthened approach to self-isolation in place for high risk/household contacts, whereby they are required to self-isolate for 10 days regardless of age, vaccination status or a negative PCR test result (correct at time of writing although self-isolation regulations remain highly fluid). The advice and guidance on school trips has also been updated to mirror the in-school mitigation and a number of other minor updates to the guidance have also been put in place.

The concerns over the rising case rate of Omicron and the changes around isolation requirements may well put a strain on school staffing arrangements and this may also continue to force schools to move learning online or ask certain year groups to work from home if supply teachers are

not available for cover. Staff can volunteer to be exempt from self-isolation under the critical worker guidance, but it is as yet unclear how many staff may volunteer for such exemption. Through the last term, Covid cases in schools remained relatively manageable across Aberdeenshire with approximately 220 pupil cases per week among young people and 20 – 30 cases among staff. This figure did rise towards the end of term and we will continue to monitor the situation closely and provide supports to schools as required.

- 3.9 USE OF OFFICES – In light of the new variant, officers adapted the approach to the use of offices by removing meantime access to meeting rooms and spaces (which had been opened up in October with 1M distancing in place) and by requiring chief officers to review the individuals using fixed workstations in offices. Those working from offices since August 2021 (approximately 400 and not all on a full time basis) continued to be restricted to those whose role or personal circumstances demanded an in-office presence. The council had taken a generally cautious approach and retained 2M distancing in its general corporate office footplate. This continues to be the case for the revised number of staff for whom there will be a requirement to work from offices. There was strong evidence of this number already self-limiting whether due to the uptake of annual leave in December or the rising public health concern.

The impact for local democracy and the formal meetings of the council involving elected members was dealt with separately in a report to the September meeting of Full Council where it was agreed to pilot 11 meetings to test hybrid meetings as part of a proposed future choice-based blended model of Fully Virtual & Hybrid meetings. The pilot was complete by the time that the new variant emerged and the results of the pilot are reported elsewhere on this agenda.

The Head of Legal & People issued a statement to Community Councils (and which can also be used for other outside bodies) holding meetings where councillor attendance might be expected. This outlines the Council position and urges a return to virtual meetings but notes that attendance is a matter at the discretion of the individual councillor.

As regards the future, officers continue to progress the Virtual Working Environment project. This project seeks to embed the concept of a Virtual Working Environment for our whole workforce and the changes that this will mean for the office estate amongst other things. Staff welfare and wellbeing is a key element of the project as the transition to new ways of working continues.

- 3.10 RECOVERY – The emergence of the new variant has emphasized the fragility of society's response to the pandemic and it has arguably never been so pronounced than now that we are "Living with COVID-19". Whilst response went in tandem with recovery previously, the focus of recovery activity centered primarily around Incident Recovery (bringing back services; supporting businesses; encouraging community resilience; controlling finances) and coming out of various phases of lockdown/periods of restriction. The significant opening up of services and activity particularly in the latter half

of 2021 following the success of the vaccination programme allowed an optimism that recovery was more prominent than response although it was always recognized that suppression of the virus would be an ongoing feature. The balance between response and recovery now appears to have shifted back to response whilst we endeavour to overcome Omicron. The Recovery Strategy agreed by Full Council in July 2020 has supported us to move toward a Recovery Programme which will be the subject of a report to Full Council in due course.

4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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 and Fairer Duty Scotland			x
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing			x
Climate Change and Sustainability			x
Health and Wellbeing			x
Town Centre First			x

- 4.3 An integrated 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.
- 4.4 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. There may be financial implications from any knock on effect on the council's capital work programmes. This would be reflected in separate reporting.

In addition to this, significant financial resources continue to be distributed from the Scottish Government via 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. Together with colleagues in Economic Development, a key focus is on ensuring that support is channelled to the affected sectors and individuals in a timely manner.

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.

- 4.5 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.
- 4.6 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**

5 Scheme of Governance

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 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.

- 5.3 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
6th January 2022

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

List of Appendices:

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

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2020

Quarter 1	01/01/20 to 31/03/20	No update.
Quarter 2	01/04/20 to 30/06/20	
Quarter 3	01/07/20 to 30/09/20	
Quarter 4	01/10/20 to 31/12/20	

2021

Quarter 1	01/01/21 to 31/03/21
Quarter 2	01/04/21 to 30/06/21
Quarter 3	01/07/21 to 30/09/21

2 July – The Scottish Government announce that all mainland Health Boards will offer drop-in Coronavirus Vaccination Clinics from the 5th of July 2021. They also announce £380 million of additional funding to help Health Boards with pandemic costs.

3 July – The Scottish Government announce that Test and Protect will prioritise high risk cases with SMS text messages being used more extensively for low risk index cases and direct telephone calls for those deemed to be of a high risk.

7 July – The Scottish Government announce the lifting of the travel restrictions to Blackburn.

9 July – The Scottish Government announce the deployment of additional staff to bolster Test and Protect.

13 July – The First Minister announces that all of Scotland will move to Protection Level 0 from the 19th of July 2021. Physical distancing will reduce to 1 metre in all indoor public settings and outdoors, informal social gatherings of up to 15 people from 15 households will be permitted outdoors without physical distancing. Mandatory face coverings will remain in place.

17 July – Scottish Government announce fully vaccinated travellers returning to Scotland from France will be required to self-isolate from Monday the 19th of July.

18 July – Scottish Government announce the vaccination programme will complete first doses for all over 18's who have attended their scheduled appointments by close of play on the 18th of July. The second doses for individuals continue to be scheduled and it is expected all adults will have received them by the 12th of September.

19 July – JCVI issues advice on the vaccination of children and young people. Children who are at increased risk of serious COVID 19 disease should be offered the Pfizer vaccine. That includes children aged 12 to 15 with severe neurodisabilities, down's syndrome, immunosuppression and multiple or severe learning disabilities.

23 July – Scottish Government announce changes to self-isolation rules for close contacts of COVID-19 cases with essential staff in critical roles being allowed to return to work to maintain lifeline services and critical national infrastructure.

28 July – Scottish Government announce that fully vaccinated people from the EU and US will be able to travel to Scotland without quarantining from the 2nd of August.

29 July – Scottish Government announce £11.5 million funding to reduce waiting times as part of NHS remobilisation efforts. They also announce nine projects supporting carers and disabled people will share £1 million to tackle loneliness and isolation as a result of the pandemic.

1 August – Scottish Government announce children and young people aged 12-17 from key groups will be offered COVID-19 vaccine.

3 August – First Minister announces Scotland to move beyond Level 0 on the 9th of August. The legal requirement for physical distancing and limits on gatherings will be removed. Some protective measures will however remain such as the use of face coverings indoors and the collection of contact details as part of Test and Protect.

4 August – Scottish Government announce all young people 16 to 17 years of age in Scotland will be offered the COVID-19 vaccine from the 6th of August.

7 August – Scottish Government announce that the two metre physical distancing will remain in place at health care settings across Scotland from the 9th of August when restrictions are to be lifted elsewhere.

12 August – The First Minister and representatives from Scotland's Trade Unions led by the STUC General Secretary meet to discuss the key issues affecting workers as Scotland recovers from the coronavirus pandemic.

17 August – Scottish Government launches consultation on Scotland's recovery. This sets out a range of proposal which include whether or not some of the temporary provisions made under the Scottish and UK wide coronavirus legislation should be maintained after March 2022. The MHRA approve the use of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine for children and young persons aged 12 to 17.

21 August – Scottish Government announce that a multi-million pound package of support has been invested to help tourism and hospitality businesses recover from the

coronavirus pandemic. The Chief Medical Officer urges pregnant women to get vaccinated.

22 August – UK Government launch UK wide antibody surveillance programme for the general public. Individuals may opt into this service through NHS Track and Trace with home anti-body tests being made available for up to 8,000 people per day.

23 August – UK Government sign a deal with Pfizer / BioNTech securing 35 million vaccines which will be delivered in the second half of 2022. The Scottish Government launch a touring fund for live music (£750,000).

24 August – Scottish Government invites views on the draft aims and principles of an independent public inquiry regarding their handling of the coronavirus pandemic. The Scottish Government urges people who test positive for COVID-19 to securely list details of their close contacts online when asked by Test and Protect.

25 August – Scottish Government announce £14 million North East Recovery and Skills Fund. This funding will provide opportunities for more than 3,000 individuals in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire through training and enterprise projects across various sectors including entrepreneurship, tourism and energy. The Scottish Government publish the NHS Recovery Plan which sets out the key actions for the next 5 years to help increase capacity by at least 10% and help address backlogs.

26 August – Scottish Government announce Canada and the Azores will be added to the green list for travel. The expanded list also includes Denmark and Switzerland. Thailand joins the red list for travel.

29 August – Scottish Government urge all under 40's to get their second dose of vaccination.

1 September – Scottish Government announce proposals which would require individuals to hold a Coronavirus Vaccination Certificate in order to enter certain events and high risk venues (e.g. nightclubs, festivals and football grounds). These proposals are scheduled to be put before the Scottish Parliament and voted on during the week commencing the 6th of September. QR Digital Vaccination Certificates for international travel will be available from the 3rd of September. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation ('JCVI') publish guidance advising that individuals who were severely immunosuppressed at the time of their first or second dose of the vaccine should be offered a third dose.

3 September – The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation ('JCVI') issue updated advice on the vaccination of children aged 12 to 15. This states that the health benefits from vaccination are marginally greater than the potential known

harms. The margin of benefit is considered too small to support the universal vaccination of health 12 to 15 year olds at this time.

7 September – The Scottish Government publish programme for Government 2021-22. The core priorities of the programmed are '*leading Scotland safely out of the pandemic, urgently confronting climate change, driving a green, fair economic recovery, and boosting opportunities for children and young people*'.

9 September – The Scottish Parliament approves Vaccine Certification Plans. From the 1st of October, Coronavirus Vaccination Certificates will be required to enter events such as nightclubs, music festivals and some football grounds. The Scottish Government launch a £10 million Long COVID Support Fund to help Health Boards respond to the condition.

10 September – The Scottish Government launch the Public Libraries COVID Recovery Fund (£1.25 million) to help libraries to reopen.

12 September – Scotland's largest ever vaccination programme will complete second doses for all over 18s who have attended their scheduled appointments by close of play on the 12th of September.

13 September – Vital aid worth £11.2 million is to be provided to Rwanda, Zambia and Malawi to help aid their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The distribution of the required PPE and materials is being funded by the Scottish Government and the £250,000 provided will cover the transport of 25 shipping containers worth of material.

14 September – The Scottish Government announce children aged 12 to 15 will be offered a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine from the 20th of September. It is also announced that safety mitigations to keep children, young people and staff safe in schools will be extended until at least the October holidays, this includes distancing, the use of face coverings by pupils in secondary schools and a strengthened recommendation in terms of lateral flow testing. The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency ('MHRA') publishes a regulatory update on the COVID-19 booster vaccine programme for winter 2021-22. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation ('JCVI') publish guidance advising that booster vaccines will be offered to those most at risk from serious disease, and those who were vaccinated during Phase 1 of the vaccine programme.

15 September – New guidance allows care home residents to choose a friend or relative as a 'named visitor' who will be able to visit them, even during a managed COVID-19 outbreak.

17 September – The UK Government relax and simplify the system relating to International Travel restrictions with a movement to a green and red list removing the amber classification. The new system also removes the requirement for a pre-departure test in England as well as the need to use lateral flow tests on date two this though has not been adopted in Scotland. The Scottish Government confirm that they will move to the relaxed and simplified travel restriction from the 4th of October. The UK Government announce that Ronapreve will be rolled out to vulnerable hospital patients this being the first neutralizing antibody medicine specifically designed to treat COVID-19 authorised for use in the UK.

20 September – Residents in care homes for older people are offered coronavirus booster vaccinations and these will be given alongside the flu vaccination following confirmation from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation ('JCVI') gave their approval. This will then be rolled out to frontline health and social care workers from the 21st of September, adults aged 70 or older or those on the high risk list (previously known as shielding) from the end of September and other eligible groups in October. Those on the highest risk list i.e. those who were severely immunosuppressed at the time of their last COVID-19 vaccination will be offered a third primary dose instead of the booster.

21 September – The Scottish Government announce additional funding of £20 million for the Scottish Ambulance Service ('SAS') to help improve response times, alleviate pressures and improve staff wellbeing.

22 September – More than 10 million COVID-19 PCR tests (10,017,000) have been carried out in Scotland over the past 19 months since testing began.

24 September – The Scottish Government announce that travellers from non-red list countries who have been fully vaccinated in a country that meets the recognised standards of certifications will no longer be required to provide evidence of a negative test result before they can travel to Scotland from the 4th of October. A five-week consultation on introducing 'Anne's Law' – to ensure people who live in adult care homes have rights to be able to have direct contact with people who are important to them in order to support their health and wellbeing.

27 September – The Scottish Government announce that all 12-15 year olds who haven't yet received their COVID-19 vaccination will receive letters of offer from today.

30 September – The Scottish Government publish an updated 2021 Vaccination Strategy. This includes plans for COVID-19 and seasonal flu vaccinations in Autumn and Winter 2021 to 2022 in Scotland. It is announced that invitations for COVID-19 have been issued to people aged 70 and over and those aged 16 and over who are at highest risk, with appointments scheduled from the week beginning the 4th of October.

Quarter 4 01/10/21 to 31/12/21

1 October – The Scottish Government’s Vaccination Certification Scheme comes into operation. People attending certain late night venues and larger indoor and outdoor live events will be required to show staff proof of their COVID status or a valid exemption. The NHS Scotland Covid Status App is made available via the NHS Inform site.

5 October – The Scottish Government publish both the ‘Coronavirus (COVID-19) education recovery: key actions and next steps’ and ‘Covid Recovery Strategy: for a fairer future’. They also announce a £300 million NHS and Care Winter Package.

7 October – The Scottish Government announce 47 countries will be taken off the international travel red list from the 11th of October. In addition, vaccine certificates from a further 37 countries will be recognised to allow quarantine-free travel to Scotland. They also announce £1.6 million funding to help local authorities deliver services that can support people affected by psychological trauma and adversity.

15 October – The Scottish Government announce NHS Lanarkshire and NHS Borders will receive military assistance from the 19th of October. The Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund is launched (£15 million).

18 October – The Scottish Government announce that the Coronavirus Vaccine Certification Scheme has become subject to enforcement.

19 October – The Scottish Government announce school mitigations will remain in place. Pupils will continue to be required to wear face coverings in secondary school classrooms as they begin to return from the October break.

20 October – The Scottish Government launch NHS Scotland Academy, a collaboration between NHS Golden Jubilee and NHS Education for Scotland, backed by £9 million of investment.

22 October – The Scottish Government publish the adult social care ‘Winter Preparedness Plan 2021-22’.

25 October – Invitations for the flu and COVID-19 Booster Vaccination Programmes begin for the next eligible groups. Invitation letters for people aged 60 to 69 and adults aged 16 and over with underlying health conditions are to be sent out.

26 October – The Scottish Government is to allocate a further £482 million to NHS Boards and Integration Authorities to meet the costs of the pandemic and remobilizing health services. The First Minister announces that from 4 am on the 31st of October, people travelling to Scotland can take a lateral flow test – rather than a PCR test – on day two of their arrival. Travellers can book lateral flow tests from the list of providers on the gov.uk site from around 5 pm on the 29th of October.

28 October – The Scottish Government announce the final 7 countries are to be removed from the international travel red list from the 1st of November, meaning travellers to the UK from those destinations will no longer have to stay in hotel quarantine for 10 days on arrival.

29 October – Scottish (and other UK) Covid Status Certificates are adopted into the European Union's Digital Covid Certificate (EU DCC) Scheme. From the 1st of November, Covid Status Certificates will be recognised by more than 40 countries. All EU DCC member countries will have their full certificates recognised and verifiable in Scotland.

31 October – The Scottish Government had committed £32 million to create a further 139 trainee doctor posts to support services under greatest pressure during the ongoing recovery from COVID-19.

1 November – It is announced that the military are to be brought in to support the national Autumn / Winter vaccination programme. Marketing campaign launched to highlight the benefit of both the flu and COVID-19 booster jabs encouraging individuals to take up the offer when invited.

2 November – The Scottish Government announce an additional £10 million winter funding for NHS Health Boards to improve A&E waiting time.

3 November – The Scottish Government issue new guidance for A&E departments, in response to a request from NHS Boards to support hospitals to refer people to the most appropriate for treatment, if they do not need emergency care.

4 November – The UK Government announce that the first oral antiviral for COVID-19 – Lagevrio (Molnupiravir) has been approved by the Medical and Health Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

9 November – The Deputy First Minister announce that from the 22nd of November, vaccines from the World Health Organisation emergency use list (Sinopharm, Sinovac, Covaxin) will be recognised as eligible vaccines for the purposes of international travel. Travelers vaccinated with these products will be eligible for quarantine-free travel in Scotland if they have a certificate of vaccination status from a country listed in the regulations. All under-18's arriving from non-red list countries will be treated as eligible vaccinated travellers, meaning they will require a Day 2 Test after arrival but no isolation or Day 8 Test.

12 November – The Scottish Government announce that people who took part in trials for COVID-19 vaccines which have not yet been authorised for use in the UK will be able to request an additional primary course of approved vaccinations.

14 November – The Scottish Government announce that hospitals in Scotland will be rolling out new three-in-one winter virus tests to identify whether patients are infected with COVID-19, flu or respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

15 November – The Scottish Government launch an online portal for the Autumn / Winter Vaccination Programme. The portal allows people aged 50 to 59, unpaid carers who are 16 and over, and those aged 16 and over who are household contacts of immunosuppressed individuals to book their booster and flu jabs. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) issues advice on COVID-19 booster vaccines for those aged 40 to 29 and second doses for 16 to 17 year olds. All adults aged 40 to 49 years should be offered an mRNA booster, 6 months after their second dose, irrespective of the vaccines given for the first and second doses. All 16 to 17 year olds who are not in at-risk group should be offered a second dose of the Pfizer vaccine. The second vaccine dose should be given 12 weeks or more following the first vaccine dose.

16 November – The Scottish Government publish an update to Scotland's Strategic Framework setting out the latest approach to managing the pandemic. The Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill is introduced to Parliament. A £25 million fund to improve ventilation in business premises and reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission will open for applications next week, small and medium businesses such as restaurants, bars and gyms will be able to claim back costs of up to £2,500 to undertake work such as the installation of carbon dioxide monitors and remedial improvement work to windows and vents.

23 November – The Scottish Government announce that from the 6th of December, people attending venues covered by Scotland's COVID certification scheme are to be given the option of providing a recent negative lateral flow test for the virus, as an alternative to proof of vaccination.

24 November – More than 1.5 million third doses and boosters administered by the Autumn / Winter Vaccination Programme.

26 November – The Scottish Government announce new travel restrictions for arrivals from South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Botswana. All travellers returning to Scotland from these countries are now required to self-isolate and take two PCR tests, regardless of their vaccination status.

27 November – The Scottish Government announce the online portal for booking COVID-19 booster appointments will open for 40-49 year olds. New travel restrictions are put in place as a result of the COVID-19 Omicron Variant, fully vaccinated arrivals will need to take a PCR test within 2 days of arrival and to self-isolate until a negative result is received. Angola, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia are added to the red list.

29 November – First cases of the COVID-19 Omicron Variant are identified in Scotland. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) issue advice on COVID-19 booster vaccines for those aged 18 to 29 and a second dose for ages 12 to 15. The booster will now be given 3 months after the primary course. In addition, a second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for young people aged 12 to 15 years is advised 12 weeks after the first dose. The Scottish Government announce £30 million funding for GP practices to help support more face to face appointments.

1 December – Transparent face masks introduced to NHS Scotland.

2 December – The Medical and Health Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) approves Xevudy (Sotrovimab), a COVID-19 treatment found to cut hospitalisation and death by 79% for people with mild to moderate COVID-19 who are at a high risk of developing severe disease. The UK Government signs contracts to buy a total of 114 million additional Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna doses for 2022 and 2023.

3 December – Confirmation of community transmission of the COVID-19 Omicron Variant in Scotland.

4 December – The Scottish Government announce that from the 7th of December, people arriving in Scotland from outside the Common Travel Area are required to provide a negative pre-departure test. It is announce that Nigeria is to be added to the red list from the 6th of November.

6 December – The Scottish Government announce that domestic COVID Certification Scheme will include provision of a negative test for COVID-19 as an alternative to proof of vaccination.

8 December – One-year anniversary of the first COVID-19 vaccination in Scotland. Since then, 4,355,063 first doses, 3,962,203 second dosed and 1,922,604 boosters and third doses have been administered from around 1,200 locations.

9 December – The First Minister writes to the Prime Minister regarding the international vaccine inequity. The letter asks the UK Government to support a temporary waiver of obligations to protect Intellectual Property for COVID-19 vaccines. An inquiry into the cause of increased excess deaths in Scotland since the start of the pandemic has been launched by the Scottish Parliament's COVID-19 Recovery Committee. A call for views has been issued, closing on the 7th of January 2022.

12 December – Social care staff urged to get the booster vaccine in the fight against the spread of the COVID-19 Omicron Variant with financial support available from the Scottish Government to assist providers who incur additional costs if employees require to be vaccinated within their working hours.

14 December - Scottish Government publish updated guidance on reducing social interaction at home or in indoor public places to a maximum of three households at any time, with everyone encouraged to take a lateral flow test before meeting. Scottish Government announce 11 countries are to be removed from the international travel red list as Omicron cases increase globally. Pre-departure tests and PCR testing measures on or before day 2 on arrival in Scotland will remain in place. Scottish Government announce the chair and terms of reference for the public inquiry into the handling of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Scotland. The Hon. Lady Poole QC, Senator of the College of Justice of Scotland, will chair the inquiry. Scottish Government announce steps to accelerate booster programme. The online booking portal will be open to everyone aged 18-29 from 15 December and the waiting period following vaccination will be reduced from 15 minutes to five minutes. Scottish Government publish Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Level statistics. The statistics show reductions in the proportions of primary school pupils achieving the expected CfR levels in literacy and numeracy over the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic period, between 2018/19 and 2020/21.

15 December - Scottish Government announce the number of military staff assisting with the autumn/winter vaccination programme has been increased to support the acceleration of the booster roll-out. Finance Secretary Kate Forbes writes a letter to the Treasury requesting further financial support to deal with the impact of the Omicron variant.

16 December - First UK patients given take-at-home pill. Molnupiravir will be tested on 10,000 people at risk of serious illness in research led by University of Oxford. Scottish Government publish new guidance for businesses. From Friday 17 December 2021, businesses will be legally required to take reasonable measures to minimise transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

17 December - Scottish Government announce the breakdown of a £100 million financial package to support businesses experiencing cancellations due to the spread of the new Omicron variant. Scottish Government publish updated guidance to reduce the risks of Covid-19 in schools, ELC services, school age childcare services and childminder services. Safety mitigations that were already in place must continue to be strictly followed and some measures that were previously relaxed are being reintroduced. Scottish Government publish updated guidance on visiting care homes and hospitals. Adult care homes and hospitals should continue to support visits for residents and patients, however new recommendations set out that visits should be in line with the rules for the general public brought in to control the spread of the Omicron variant of Covid-19. Scottish Government announce funding of £25 million to support community projects and local economies. The Regeneration Capital Grant Fund will support 22 locally developed place-based projects that tackle inequalities and promote sustainable and inclusive economic recovery from the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Scottish Government publish a letter from the Minister for Higher

Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training on measures to reduce transmission of Omicron variant in the college and university sectors. The Scottish Government publish the December updated of the Autumn / Winter Vaccination Strategy 2021, which includes as progress report and accelerated delivery plans in response to the Omicron Variant.

21 December – Scottish Government announce one metre physical distancing to return in indoor hospitality and leisure settings from the 27th December. Attendance at large events will be limited (100 people for indoor standing events, to 200 for indoor seated events, and to 500 for all outdoor events) from the 26th December.

22 December – The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) issues updated guidance on vaccinations for 5 to 11 year olds, recommending that those who are in a clinical risk group or are a household contact of someone who is immunosuppressed, should be offered a primary course of the vaccination. In addition, booster vaccinations are recommended for 16-17 year olds and 12-15 year olds that are in a clinical risk group or severely immunocompromised and have had a third primary dose. The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) approves a new formulation of the Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine (Comirnaty) for use in children aged 5 to 11 years.

23 December – More than 70% of eligible adults in Scotland have received their booster or third dose. The Scottish Government announce that nightclubs are to close from the 27th of December, subject to a review after 3 weeks.

26 December - Temporary measures to limit the spread of the Omicron Variant whilst the booster vaccination programme takes effect have come into force from 0500 – attendance at large events has been limited to: 100 people for indoor standing events, 200 people for indoor seated events and 500 people for all outdoor events (seated or standing).

27 December – Temporary measures to limit the spread of the Omicron Variant whilst the booster vaccination programme takes effect have come into force from 0500 – 1 metre physical distancing is reinstated in all hospitality and indoor leisure settings including pubs, restaurants, gyms, theatres and museums amongst others. Table service is also required where alcohol is served for consumption on the premises. Nightclubs are to close but will have the option of remaining open if they operate with table service and physical distancing, in line with the requirements for other hospitality businesses. It is announced that the restrictions will be backed by £375 million in business support with full details to be announced shortly. Hospitality businesses are already eligible for top up funding through the December and January Business Top Up. Further guidance has also been published in order to support businesses to take reasonable measures to limit the rapid spread of the Omicron Variant.

29 December – The First Minister announces how the £107 million is being allocated to support businesses impacted by the spread of the Omicron Variant. This is on top of the initial £100 million lifeline package which has already been put in place and forms part of the £375 million of support announced on the 27th of December. The £107 million is to be allocated as follows - £32 million more for hospitality and leisure businesses, £10 million targeting parts of the hospitality industry most severely affected by the requirement for table service, £5 million targeted support for nightclubs now required to close, £27 million for culture, due to impact of physical distancing and caps on attendance, £17 million of events, due to impact of physical distancing and caps on attendance and £16 million for existing public transport COVID-19 support schemes to recognize the impact on fare revenue. It is also announced that essential workers, those at high risk and anyone eligible for new COVID treatments will be prioritized for a PCR Test Site Slot, this measure is being taken to ensure timely access to PCR testing, as rising rates of COVID-19 infections are resulting in increasing demand. Test and Protect will also focus their resources on those most at risk of harm with the majority of people out with this group simply being contacted by text or email.

31 December – The Scottish Health Secretary pays tribute to the people of Scotland for their collective effort and success in getting almost 2.98 million people boosted before the new year. It is also announced that the Scottish Government met its target of offering every eligible young person and adult over 18 an appointment by the end of the year. Nearly 77% of all eligible adults had received a booster or third dose by the 30th of December.

2022

2 January – The Scottish Government urge families to get young people aged 12-15 their second dose of COVID Vaccine as early as possible in the New Year with Drop In Sessions being made available for this age group from the 3rd of January 2022. This follows the advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) that this age group can receive their second dose after 12 weeks of receiving their first vaccine.

3 January – Secondary pupils are advised to take at-home COVID-19 tests before they return to school to limit the spread of the Omicron Variant. Those without symptoms are advised to do a lateral flow test the night before or on the morning of returning to classes and this should thereafter be done twice weekly with all test results being recorded via the online portal. School staff and those within early learning and childcare settings have been asked to follow the same advice. Anyone who receives a positive lateral flow test result, those with symptoms or those identified as close contacts should immediately self-isolate and book a PCR test. Details of the £65 million financial package for culture and major events are confirmed with this being split as follows: £31.5 million for cultural businesses, organisations, venues and

independent cinema support and grassroots venues, £2 million for National Performing Companies, £10 million for Freelancers, £19.8 million for the Events Sector and £1.7 million for Museums, Galleries and Heritages, funds will be allocated by Local Authorities.

5 January – The First Minister announces changes to the self-isolation rules in line with public health advice and testing requirements to help maximise testing capacity and ensure a speedier start to the process of contact tracing. Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, must still isolate for 10 days, however from the 6th of January, new cases will be advised that they can end self-isolation if they don't have a fever and test negative on a Lateral Flow Device on day 6 and again at least 24 hours later. Triple Vaccinated closed contacts of those who test positive, both household and non-household, or those under the age of 18 and four months, do not need to isolate as long as they return a negative Lateral Flow test result each day for 7 consecutive days, and remain fever free. Further details are released in terms of the support for business which is to be put in place these were as follows: Up to £28 million will be allocated to Taxi and Private Hire Car Drivers and Operators, £19 million will support services such as beauticians and hairdressers, £5 million will be provided for sport and an additional £3 million for tourism, funds will be allocated by Local Authorities.