

**MINUTE**  
**of**  
**EMERGENCIES COMMITTEE**

**Minute of Meeting held at 2.00pm on 21 May 2020.**

**Present:**

Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)  
Councillor Stewart Miller

Councillor Paul O’Kane

Councillor Buchanan, Leader, in the Chair

**Attending:**

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Caroline Innes, Deputy Chief Executive; Andy Cahill, Director of Environment; Julie Murray, Chief Officer – HSCP; Mark Ratter, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance); and Eamonn Daly, Democratic Services Manager.

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**1258.** There were no declarations of interest intimated.

**COVID-19 ACTIONS**

**1259.** The committee considered a report by the Chief Executive providing comprehensive information on the actions taken by the Council and partners in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

By way of background the report referred to the Prime Minister’s lockdown announcement of 23 March, and explained that following the announcement the Council had moved into full emergency mode with the priorities being to keep residents and staff safe, continue to provide critical services and to support the work of the NHS.

The report set out some of the implications of the lockdown including restrictions on non-essential travel. This resulted in a significant proportion of Council staff working from home and many buildings being closed, and a change to the ways in which services were delivered.

It was explained that the Scottish Government had asked local government to take on a range of new duties at short notice such as shielding support for vulnerable residents, in addition to continuing to deliver normal services. This was at a time when large numbers of Council staff were themselves affected by coronavirus. In particular a number of critical frontline services were severely impacted.

The report highlighted that despite the challenges, staff had been exceptional with many working significant additional hours to ensure the safety and wellbeing of local residents; others volunteering to undertake new and additional duties, also while in many cases dealing with the additional challenges of home learning.

Thereafter, the report explained that the Council was a Category 1 responder in terms of civil contingencies legislation and explained that internal and external communications, officer decision-making and response arrangements to emergencies were already firmly established through existing strategic, tactical and operational meeting structures.

The report set out the operating structures in place explaining that the Council's emergency planning structures were part of a much wider regional and national structure, setting out the links between the Council, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and the six authorities within the health board area in addition to Argyll & Bute Council and other appropriate multi-agency partners.

The report clarified that 6 issue specific sub-groups of the Council's Corporate Resilience Management Team had been set up, each focussing on a unique facet of the response to COVID-19. Details of the composition, lead officer and area of responsibility of each sub-group were set out with information on the work of each group set out in Appendix 1 accompanying the report.

Thereafter the report set out the actions that had been taken by departments of the Council and the Culture and Leisure Trust in responding to the pandemic, both in respect of department specific actions and those being directed through the CRMT and its sub-groups. Details of the activities of the Culture and Leisure Trust were set out in Appendix 2 accompanying the report.

The report also referred to the decision taken by the Council to temporarily suspend delegations to committees and for these decisions to be taken by officers. A list of those decisions taken by officers using the extended delegated powers accompanied the report at Appendix 3.

The report concluded by explaining that despite the severe challenges that have faced the Council, it has continued to deliver existing services as well as quickly adapting to providing a variety of new services and supports for the local community.

It was highlighted that it had to be borne in mind that Council staff had not been immune to the effects of the virus and that this had added to the challenge of continuing to provide services, and emphasised that the efforts staff had been making to provide the services, particularly front line services where staff were most at risk of coming into contact with the virus, should not go unrecognised. It had been necessary to review service provision based on immediate need and that whilst this has seen a reduction in some existing service provision it has now been possible for some of these services to be reintroduced. This would continue to be the subject of review as the Council moved into recovery.

The Chief Executive was then heard further on the terms of the report. She praised the huge efforts made by staff across the Council to continue to deliver existing services as well as delivering additional new services, often whilst adapting to new ways of working. She explained that all efforts had been focussed on dealing with the impact of the crisis and summarised the governance structures in place referring in particular to the 6 sub-groups and to the work of the officers who had led each of these groups,

Thereafter the Chief Officer – HSCP; Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance); Director of Environment; Deputy Chief Executive; and Chief Executive were heard further on the information contained in the report in respect of the work carried out by their respective departments. In addition the Chief Executive also highlighted the excellent partnership working with the Culture and Leisure Trust referring in particular to the childcare support that furloughed staff from the Trust would be providing over the summer months.

Having heard the officers, full discussion took place.

In response to comments from Councillor Miller the Director of Environment undertook to investigate possible fly-tipping at Cathcart Cemetery. He also explained in response to Councillor O’Kane the reasons why only Barrhead civic amenity site and not the Greenhags facility would be opened to the public on 1 June. A communications plan was in place for the reopening. He explained that a ward-based approach was being used with the public being encouraged to visit the site on specific days based on their Council ward, although it was recognised that non-compliance would be difficult to enforce. He also confirmed that he would share this information with councillors to enable them to share it on social media.

Having heard from the officers in turn Councillor Buchanan was heard in reply.

In respect of the HSCP he emphasised how the strong partnership arrangements already in place had helped in responding to the crisis. He explained that the learning that would flow from the way in which the service had responded would help in improving future service delivery. He also highlighted the potential for increased demand for certain services as lockdown restrictions were eased, particularly those provided by the HSCP, and that services needed to be prepared to deliver on these.

With regards to education, he highlighted the positive feedback that had been received on the excellent online resources teachers had been providing which would continue to be used in future. He also commended the work being carried out to ensure the wellbeing of vulnerable children, and welcomed that despite the current challenges the department would be able to provide 1140 of nursery provision from August even though the legal requirement to do so had been suspended.

Commenting on the Environment Department, he referred in particular to the vast variety of services provided, the challenges of continuing to provide these whilst at the same time developing arrangements to deliver new services, and paid tribute to the enthusiasm with which staff had been prepared to take on different roles and responsibilities.

In respect of the Corporate and Community Services Department, Councillor Buchanan referred to the ICT challenges of ensuring that those employees who had to work from home were able to do so, and also to the efforts of staff in contacting those local residents on the shielding list.

Having acknowledged the work of the Trust, Councillor Buchanan also referred to the work of the finance team in keeping track of the Council’s spending during the crisis. Commenting generally on the financial implications of crisis, he suggested that it would be some time before the true costs associated with dealing with the virus would be clear. There would be financial implications at all levels of government including local government, and it was vital that councils were able to accurately record any additional costs to ensure they were taken into account in future discussions with the Scottish Government on local government funding.

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In conclusion, Councillor Buchan, Councillor Miller and Councillor O’Kane thanked staff across the Council for their exemplary efforts. They acknowledged that despite extremely challenging circumstances the Council had not only continued to deliver services in many cases using innovative new methods of service delivery, but had in addition taken on and delivered numerous new services.

Councillor Buchanan having highlighted how the paper clearly demonstrated the huge amount of work carried out by the Council and partners, and it was important that it was widely publicised to ensure the public were aware of the challenges facing the Council and how these were being addressed, the committee noted the report.

CHAIR