

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL3 March 2022Report by Chief ExecutiveSTRATEGIC PLANNING**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. This paper gives an update on strategic planning within East Renfrewshire Council, specifically with a focus on the impact of the pandemic and the outlook for a refresh of 'Vision for the Future' later this year.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. Council is asked to:

- (a) Note the background to the development of 'Vision for the Future'; its purpose and ambitions; that the Pandemic will have cross-cutting short, medium and long term impacts; and to recommit to refreshing 'Vision for the Future' to take account of these challenges as well as the opportunities that lie ahead as we work alongside partners and communities to shape and progress East Renfrewshire's post-pandemic recovery and renewal; and
- (b) Agree to use the outputs of the budget engagement, Citizens' Panel and Humanitarian research to inform future strategic planning, including 'Vision for the Future'.

**BACKGROUND**

3. The first 'Vision for the Future' document was published in September 2015 and gave a forward direction for the Council over a timeline of 10 years. The document has evolved over time and is underpinned by:

- an analysis of current socio-economic demographics and expected future trends and patterns for the local area through 'Planning for the Future';
- a broad assessment of the political, economic, social and technological trends affecting East Renfrewshire;
- a self-evaluation assessment of the Council's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (challenges);
- an overview of what residents tell us is important to them through the Citizens' Panel and various engagement activities; and
- scenarios around future financial planning, although it was acknowledged that finance remained one of the biggest areas of uncertainty.

4. Council approved an updated 'Vision for the Future' in February 2020. This set out the long-term ambitions for the work of East Renfrewshire Council and provided a platform and context to deliver our Community Plan, Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP: Fairer) and the wider inter-connected family of strategies that guide the work of Council and partner services. A key theme of the update was to continue to strengthen physical and social 'connections' within East Renfrewshire – for example linking greenspaces; improving public

transport and active travel routes such as pathways and cycleways; connections within and between our communities and local town centres; and also social connections between the council, residents, communities and our services and their users.

5. Rather than act as a timebound strategy, 'Vision for the Future' was viewed as the beginning of an evolving conversation on what the future might look like and how the Council, residents, communities of interest, community groups and third sector partners, local businesses and wider partner agencies could work together to achieve our shared ambitions for the area. As such it does not have its own action plans. Instead it set the direction which would be followed through in various other plans and strategies and be reflected in Local Development Plan 3, wider City Region work and through the refreshed Capital Investment Strategy and the Council's Outcome Delivery Plans.

## **PANDEMIC RESPONSE & RECOVERY PLANNING**

6. In February 2020, no-one could have envisaged the disruption that that lay ahead with the onset of a global pandemic and its resulting impact on our services, our communities and our ways of life. Through the last 2 years the public sector has sought to balance its key statutory duties and priorities, alongside a pandemic response, often straddling the boundaries of response, recovery and renewal simultaneously.

7. Partnership working has been a key strength throughout the last 2 years and the community response has also been positive with innovation in community organisations and neighbours supporting one another. While most normal community group activity has been disrupted or stopped over the pandemic the depth of partnership working between the Council, HSCP and the third sector has never been closer, more collaborative in nature or more deeply integrated.

8. From July to December 2020 a Member Officer Working Group, comprised of a cross-party group of elected members and relevant senior officers from across the Council, HSCP and ERCLT met to review and discuss the issues and opportunities around East Renfrewshire's post-pandemic recovery. The group looked at: the extent to which the Council was engaged in response, recovery and business-as-usual simultaneously; the shift to home working by residents; the increased use and reliance on digital technology to connect with people and access services; the economic impact on the wider economy and local businesses; potential entrenchment of existing poverty and disadvantage; positive increases in active travel (e.g. use of cycleways) and challenges with public transport and the shift to more environmentally sustainable travel options; community connections and well-being; impact on mental and physical health; and increasing the overall sustainability of East Renfrewshire as a place.

9. It was noted that the pandemic had actually had positive impacts on the 2 main themes of 'Vision for the Future'. With people largely confined to working at home and spending more time in their local areas, there were positive impacts for communities and for sustainability/'green' themes.

10. The Council has been able to make good progress on its climate change agenda over the last year with a 'Get to Zero' strategy underway. As part of the COP26 legacy, the planting of 10,400 trees through creation of 26 small wooded areas has also begun, providing areas of beauty for the local community to visit, but also playing a key part in delivering our climate change commitment. Initiatives like this will be key foundations of 'Vision for the Future'.

11. The rise of the Delta and Omicron variants of the pandemic once again pushed the Council back towards a heavier focus on response in 2021. As we are now hopefully moving

out of the most recent Omicron wave and as we prepare for the outcome of the local government elections, 2022 is an opportune time to revisit, refresh and rearticulate East Renfrewshire's 'Vision for the Future'.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF PANDEMIC**

12. Over 2021 and into 2022, three key pieces of broad-based research and community engagement have been undertaken and concluded:

- Citizens Panel Survey 2021
- Humanitarian Research into the Impact of COVID-19 in East Renfrewshire
- One-year 2022-23 Budget Consultation

13. These provide us insight into the ways the pandemic has affected local people and communities. This research can help inform our priorities as we move forward into recovery and renewal and seek to refresh our 'Vision for the Future'.

14. There has been a wide reach across the various aspects of the research, including a 62% response rate (581 respondents) to the Citizens' Panel; 150 in-depth interviews with local residents, community groups, businesses and key stakeholders (including elected members) as part of Humanitarian research and 251 responses to the Council's budget engagement survey.

15. It is useful to consider the findings from the 3 pieces of research using the 'Four Harms' approach: direct health impacts; indirect health and social care impacts; wider impact on wellbeing and quality of life and economic impacts.

### Direct Health Impacts

16. By early February 2022 over 24,000 East Renfrewshire residents has received a positive PCR tests over the course of the pandemic. Separately since early January 2022, East Renfrewshire residents have reported 2300 Lateral Flow Device positive tests. Accounting for asymptomatic infections and other factors Public Health Officials have estimated that positive test results account for approximately 40% of all COVID infections with the level of community infection being around 2 to 3 times that reported by test results at any given time.

17. As of 8 February 2022: 96.3% of East Renfrewshire residents 12 yrs+ had received one dose of the vaccine; 91.3% two doses; and 75.5% had received a third or booster dose (82.9% of 18yrs+ and 90.6% of 40yrs+).

18. Tragically there have been 207 COVID-related deaths, and we have seen an overall death-rate around 10% higher than normal. Nationally we know that the death rate has been higher among older and Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) populations.

19. The impact of Long-COVID remains uncertain with suggestions 5-15% of positive cases (i.e. 1200 to 3600 locally) could result in Long-COVID, with prevalence higher in those aged 35-64, women and those with disabilities/long-term illness and living in more deprived areas.

### Indirect Health & Social Care Impacts

20. There are a range of wider health and social care impacts across loneliness, mental health, increased alcohol consumption, reduction in physical fitness and activity level and delayed diagnosis.

21. Mental health was significantly negatively impacted as a result of the pandemic. 23% of residents reported a fall in their happiness and 11% an increase in anxiety. One in 3 adults reported an increased alcohol consumption. At the same time, lockdowns and home working led to a decline in physical activity.

22. While public services rapidly adapted to providing remote services, some vulnerable key groups such as older people and people with additional support needs were more likely to struggle with accessing digital services, as well as using digital tools to stay connected with friends and family. As result feelings of isolation were exacerbated for some people and this also contributed to delayed diagnosis of conditions - already a serious factor as people put off contacting health or social care services believing they were helping to relieve the overall burden at a difficult time.

23. The research findings, alongside insights from the NHS, have suggested that the key groups most likely to be impacted by indirect health and social care impacts include:

- Older residents, especially those with dementia
- People with long-term conditions, including addictions relapse
- Children and adults with mental health needs
- Pregnant women, women reaching menopause
- Those living alone, including single parents
- Those without local family/friends or informal support.

24. These wider health and social care impacts will continue to generate significant challenges for services. Services are dealing with increasing complexity of cases and needs. This is adding pressure to already limited homecare/daycare provision. These challenges are compounded by higher levels of staff absence (as they themselves have been impacted by the pandemic and wider health issues); recruitment challenges, especially in the private sector; and come as issues of staff burn-out and resilience become factors.

25. While community services and groups can play a key role in helping to mitigate and address some elements of health and social care support, concerns about the potential impact of funding coming to an end for community services and groups remain.

### Impacts on Society, Wellbeing & Quality of Life

26. The Citizens' Panel reported ongoing strong satisfaction with East Renfrewshire as a place to live (89%). However, 90% of Citizen Panel respondents indicated that their quality of life had been negatively impacted by the pandemic. This was particularly around education, mental health and wellbeing and access to health and social care services. Satisfaction with Council services (67%) remained fairly strong given the disruption created by the pandemic both in absence rates within our own staff groups and the need to respond to new requirements and undertake new areas of service delivery and response.

27. Some people reported positive outcomes of the pandemic, including more time with family; better work/life balance; a greater sense of community and more time to volunteer;

improved digital literacy; quieter/better quality environment and more use of outdoor space; feeling safer using active travel (e.g. cycleways) and more use of remote service contact (e.g. online rather than face to face).

28. Overall the factors that most impacted people's quality of life were driven by extended periods without personal and/or social contact; relationship breakdowns, financial uncertainty and debt; health impacts and the psychological uncertainty and fatigue generated by the pandemic itself, particularly a loss of confidence among older people. While these factors could impact anyone; older people, people with disabilities or long-term limiting illnesses; parents of young children; families supporting and people with additional support needs; women; and lower income households were particularly affected. Over the course of the pandemic there have been increases in domestic violence and children and young people requiring to be taken into care.

29. Children and young people's education has also been disrupted over the course of the pandemic. This has been well documented nationally and locally and it remains a high priority for the Council. The Education Department recognised the risks that the pandemic presented to reversing some of the progress that had been made in closing the attainment gap. It has taken a targeted approach to mitigating as many of the negative impacts as possible. Early indicators suggest that this approach has benefitted children and young people. However, this approach will be ongoing with continued support to fully address the negative impacts of the pandemic.

### Economic Impacts

30. Around 1 in 5 indicated that the employment status or income of the main household earner had been affected by the pandemic and almost 40% had to make changes due to the impact on employment and/or income at some point. The number of out of work benefit claimants remains substantially above pre-COVID levels with the Benefit claimant count 42% higher than January 2020. The most significant impacts are among the under 35's.

31. The Council has seen a significant increase in demand for financial support. Demand for foodbank/larder support increased around 50%. Scottish Welfare Fund claims rose 37% and demand for support from the Monet Advice and Rights Team (MART) rose 81%.

32. The need for these types of supports was greatest among the under 35s, people on lower incomes, renters the self-employed and those living in the most deprived areas. However overall, the profile of people seeking support shifted during the pandemic to people who were in-work and previously "getting by" where reduced work hours and increased-costs built up to a crisis point for them. Services were seeing an increase in individuals and families that had not previously required support and were seeking help for the first time. It should be noted that people on lower incomes who had to go out to work during the pandemic did not see the reduced travelling and living cost benefits that many people working from home experienced. As a result of these types of factors there remains an ongoing risk that the pandemic will lead to a growing inequality gap.

33. In the one-year budget consultation, there was a mixed picture of understanding of the challenges facing the Council. While there is some understanding of the fiscal challenges facing the Council respondents had competing high priorities across pandemic response and recovery (Education and Health & Social Care), tackling the climate change, operating services under business as usual and continuing to progress digital transformation and improve key Council services such as roads. The top priorities that local people cited were: Education; Health & Social Care; Health, Leisure & Wellbeing; Economy; and Roads. These were followed by the Environment, Communities, Transport, Reducing Poverty, Improving Council operations and reducing costs.

34. At the same time there were mixed views on the extent to which the Council should consider implementing higher charges for services (12.6% Definitely, 43.3% Maybe, 40.5% Definitely Not).

## RECOVERY PRIORITIES

35. Overall people want to see the Council take action to recover from the pandemic, while also providing business as usual services in modern ways, as efficiently as possible. Across the three pieces of engagement work the public see a broad range of activities as important:

- Supporting young people and the most vulnerable to repair or minimise the damage done by the pandemic to their life, education and wider well-being.
- Tackling mental health and isolation issues
- Supporting the local economy and continuing to improve roads.
- Tackling climate change and protecting green spaces

36. The 3 pieces of research suggest that there are several priority groups that should be priorities for recovery support. These include:

- Children and young people – especially those with additional support needs
- Older people
- Those with disabilities and long-term conditions
- Carers, especially carers of people with dementia
- Single households, especially older people and single parents
- Young families, especially those in social housing
- Those with language barriers
- Women experiencing domestic violence.

37. Common with the national picture, key themes for response and recovery locally include:

- The role of communities and the third sector in response and recovery
- Wellbeing and mental health
- Continued support to fully address the negative impacts of the pandemic on children and young people's learning and achievement
- Ongoing need for financial and practical support, which may pose financial challenges ahead
- Re-building resilience
- Focusing on existing inequalities and reaching new areas of need.

38. These priorities will be mainstreamed throughout the Council's strategic planning, including 'Vision for the Future'.

## NEXT STEPS

39. In one respect the foundations of 'Vision for the Future' remain largely unchanged by the pandemic. Our key outcomes remain as relevant as ever and arguably the pandemic has moved us forward in the theme of 'connections' – between communities; driving a more local lifestyle and with greater focus on green issues, climate change and use of greenspaces. There is an opportunity to build on this as we move forward into a new phase of recovery and renewal.

40. The pandemic has also brought other areas into sharp focus including impacts on the economy, poverty, health, educational outcomes and new funding commitments and responsibilities for local government to deliver, with wider sectoral change also on the horizon through for example the National Care Service.

41. As the scope and reach of recovery and renewal themes were so widespread across all our services, the Member Officer Working Group agreed that the Council would mainstream these themes into key plans and strategies rather than develop a separate recovery plan. In addition, there have been regular updates to Council and IJB on the pandemic response and key recovery issues. Various services have already mainstreamed recovery and renewal into their planning frameworks, including the HSCP Strategic Plan, Education's 'Building Back Better & Fairer' approach, the Local Child Poverty Action Plan and building commitments of 'The Promise' into the Children's Services Plan.

42. There are also several key themes being led by the Environment Department as we move towards adoption of LDP2 and planning for LDP3, these include attracting back people to town centres (e.g. HERE campaign and shop local scheme), community wealth building, 20 minute neighbourhoods, active travel, Get to Zero action plan and the final phases of City Deal delivery. In October 2021 the Council voted to formally declare a Climate Emergency and work is now underway to set up a Climate Change Partnership Group involving local groups and businesses.

43. The shift to digital-first provision for service delivery and working at home will also bring significant changes to the way we work, with a presumption on a 'hybrid working' approach which will see appropriate staff develop a balance between office and home working. This will have implications for how we interact with customers, how we use our buildings and how we build in effective time for sharing, development and collaboration face-to-face.

44. It is suggested that we take some time to consider the research as we build recovery and renewal into our strategic planning. There is potential for a review of 'Vision for the Future' later this year, working closely with the new Administration and elected members to shape and develop this vision for the next 10 years.

## **FINANCE & EFFICIENCY**

45. There are no specific finance or efficiency implications as 'Vision for the Future' does not set out firm proposals or make decisions. This broad vision will however influence spending proposals in the years ahead as the themes within develop. There will be close links with the Council's long-term financial plan, which is set out in a separate paper on today's agenda.

## **CONSULTATION AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

46. 'Vision for the Future' is not a traditional consultation process with a set of proposals and a beginning and an end. This is the beginning of a broader, long-term culture shift towards a series of ongoing conversations led from across the Council which will help us develop and shape views and proposals for the future. There are many services now keen to have more strategic, longer-term conversations with communities, rather than one-off engagements – this will build knowledge and understanding, put the customer at the heart of service design and develop themes of co-production and community empowerment.

47. Our success in setting out and working together towards a broad vision for East Renfrewshire over the next 10 years will be about continuing the insightful and valuable conversations and in broadening the range of stakeholders who can participate in these ongoing dialogues, including building the capacity of communities to participate as an equal partner.

48. There are also opportunities now to think collectively and creatively about we drive forward our ambitions for the area as part of our renewal and recovery. Both the Council and its partners have access to short-term funding opportunities including for humanitarian support and to address mental health and wellbeing – a collaborative approach will help ensure the most sustainable approaches, which will empower local communities and give them a stake in delivery. It may be that, as we consider the next iterations of ‘Vision for the Future’, we may want to be more explicit in our ask of local people with opportunities for them to play their part by recycling, using online services, helping us design services, engaging actively and constructively, paying their Council Tax, and changing their behaviours to contribute to Net Zero for climate change.

49. It is impossible to separate a vision for the work of East Renfrewshire Council from a vision for East Renfrewshire itself. We cannot deliver this vision alone; partnership working will be critical to this journey. Amongst others, it is key that we continue our successful relationships with our Community Planning partners; the Culture and Leisure Trust; the Health and Social Care Partnership; our City Region colleagues; local businesses; and the West Partnership Regional Improvement Collaborative. Together we have huge ambitions for East Renfrewshire and our strength will be in working together to achieve and deliver over the next 10 years and beyond.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

50. ‘Vision for the Future’ seeks to begin an ongoing dialogue on the Council’s broad, long-term direction of travel for making lives better within East Renfrewshire and delivering on the agreed outcomes in our Community Plan.

51. Given its overarching nature, ‘Vision for the Future’ does not make a strategic decision in its own right therefore it is considered out of scope for specific assessments under the Fairer Scotland Duty and equality impact.

52. We will continue to ensure East Renfrewshire Council is well placed for putting equalities and economic and social rights at the heart of strategic decision making and, as strategic decisions are made during the life of ‘Vision for the Future’, we will assess and consider any current inequalities of outcome and potential socioeconomic impact at that time.

## **CONCLUSION**

53. When ‘Vision for the Future’ was last considered in 2020 we could not have envisaged what lay ahead. The pandemic has had an unprecedented and indelible impact on all our lives and our services; the ways we work, travel and live; and our mental health and wellbeing. We are only now beginning to understand the longer-term lasting impact that the pandemic will have and it is important we take time to reflect, to consider research, to build on those conversations and to ensure that recovery and renewal become key themes mainstreamed across our strategic planning.

54. ‘Vision for the Future’ was described as a direction of travel rather than a detailed strategy. The Council doesn’t claim to have all the answers and we genuinely want to hear



ideas about how we can best work together to improve the lives of people across East Renfrewshire over the next 10 years. Our goal is to continue that dialogue with a broad range of stakeholders as we continue to build and shape our vision as a modern, ambitious council creating a fairer future with all.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

55. Council is asked to:

- (a) Note the background to the development of 'Vision for the Future'; its purpose and ambitions; that the Pandemic will have cross-cutting short, medium and long term impacts; and to recommit to refreshing 'Vision for the Future' to take account of these challenges as well as the opportunities that lie ahead as we work alongside partners and communities to shape and progress East Renfrewshire's post-pandemic recovery and renewal; and
- (b) Agree to use the outputs of the budget engagement, Citizens Panel and Humanitarian research to inform future strategic planning, including 'Vision for the Future'.

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive  
February 2022

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## BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Financial Planning 2021-2027, Council 25 February 2021
- Vision for the Future, Council 27 February 2020
- Vision for the Future, Council 1 May 2019
- Strategic Planning, Council 31 October 2018
- Vision for the Future: Update Report, Cabinet 23 March 2017

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