

STIRLING COUNCIL

Mainstreaming Report 2021

Service Delivery

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INTRODUCTION

Mainstreaming Equality In Delivering Services 2021

This report updates Stirling Council's Mainstreaming Report 2019 (Service Delivery). It confirms how the Council continues to mainstream equality across its activities and functions and in doing so fulfils its statutory obligations under the 2010 Equality Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

For consistency with previous Mainstreaming Reports, a similar report structure has been used and adapted where required to reflect any changes in the organisational structure of the authority.

Section 2 confirms the Council's strategic approach to fulfilling its equality responsibilities. This focusses on decision making structures, the use of Equality Impact Assessments, and corporate activities undertaken across the authority. Section 3 confirm how the Council continues to mainstream equality into service delivery.

Information is also provided on the impact of the pandemic on the Council's activities. This confirms the extensive work undertaken by the authority to adapt its operations and service delivery arrangements to ensure that as far as possible these have been maintained and potentially improved, particularly for our most vulnerable citizens and communities.

2.0 CORPORATE & STRATEGIC ACTIVITY

2.1 Strategic Context, Approach and Responsibilities

The Stirling Plan (2017- 27), Stirling Community Planning Partnership's Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP), provides the strategic context for the Council's approach to securing equality for its citizens and communities. Equality considerations are clearly evident in the strategic priorities of the Stirling Plan which recognises the need to address inequalities between our most and least deprived citizens and communities. This aim also underlines the Council's Key Priorities and Considerations (2017). The aim of addressing inequality, particularly socio economic inequality, also underpins Thriving Stirling (2020-30), approved by the Council in December 2020.

2.2 Thriving Stirling sets out the strategic direction for the Council for the next ten years in response to the major challenges it anticipates facing over this time period, including the impact of Covid -19. The strategy sets out the intention to improve the lives and prospects of everyone in Stirling by improving equality with regards to social, economic, educational and health outcomes across all communities, with a particular focus on communities which need higher levels of support to achieve better economic, social and health outcomes. Delivery of the strategy will be undertaken through sustained involvement with Stirling's citizens and communities, supported by a workforce which is valued and enabled, and in partnership with public, private and third sector partners.

2.3 Stirling Council believes every customer, citizen and employee or prospective employee, has the right to receive fair and equal treatment. It is committed to promoting fairness, dignity, respect and equal opportunity for every member of the public and employee across the Council area and has adopted the following equality principles:-

- Remove or minimise disadvantage for our most vulnerable citizens and communities.
- Ensure equality is integral to our decision making.
- Respond effectively to equality issues on behalf of our citizens, communities and employees.
- Ensure equality considerations are integral to our planning, development and review activity
- Develop policies and practices based on evidence including information obtained through engagement with local communities.

2.4 The elected member with Portfolio responsibility for equality and diversity rests with the Convener of the Community Planning & Regeneration Committee with the Chief Officer - Strategic Commissioning & Customer Development the lead officer for equality and diversity in the Council.

2.5 Decision Making

In addition to the Council, the authority has five "Decision Making Committees": Children & Young People, Community Planning & Regeneration, Environment & Housing, Finance & Economy and Public Safety Committees. All have responsibility for "ensuring compliance with the public sector equality duty by paying due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality, and foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not".

2.6 Additional Committees and Panels include:

- an Audit Committee responsible for the promotion of good governance, establishing and monitoring internal controls and financial and risk management arrangements
- the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal Joint Committee which is the - decision making forum for all City Region Deal matters

- the Pre-Determination Hearing Committee to conduct pre-determination hearings for planning applications which are national developments or major developments significantly contrary to the Council's Development Plan
- A series of Panels dealing with quasi-judicial matters and operational responsibilities including Adult Social Care, Civic matters, HR matters including appointments, disciplinary procedures and grievances, Health & Safety and Planning and Development

2.7 Equality considerations are incorporated into the Council's decision-making processes through the use of Equality Impact Assessments and all reports to Council or a Decision Making Committee require to be accompanied by an assessment confirming whether or not an EqlA is required (EqlA Relevance Check), or an EqlA where relevant. Committee Officers monitor compliance with this requirement with any issues escalated to the Chief Governance Officer. This approach also applies to financial decisions, whether for individual proposals or as part of a wider budget setting exercise.

Impact of Covid

Revised decision making processes introduced in response to the pandemic included the awarding emergency decision making powers to the Chief Executive and establishment of a short life working group to agree arrangements for the operation of Council, Committees, Panels and the Licensing Board. In accordance with regulations restricting social interaction Committee and Panel meetings are held remotely with attendance by elected members and officers through the digital platform Microsoft Teams. To ensure the Council's decision making processes continued to be transparent, meetings are recorded and made available for public viewing via YouTube.

2.8 Equality Impact Assessment (EqlA)

The Council's methodology for undertaking equality impact assessment comprises:

- an EqlA Relevance Check to help determine when an assessment is required and record the decision taken
- an Equality Impact Assessment Form for completion where it has been determined that an assessment is required
- guidance to help elected officers and elected members understand the purpose and process of undertaking an EqlA, carry out robust assessments and in turn place equality at the centre of their thinking

Consideration of the potential impact of proposals on people and communities experiencing or vulnerable to poverty, has been included in the assessment process since 2012. This has also been updated to take account of the Stirling Plan and Council Key Priorities and Considerations (2017) and the Fairer Scotland Duty introduced in 2018.

2.9 The Council's commitment to incorporating equality considerations into its decision making was supported by training for elected members on equalities and diversity including the use and consideration of Equality Impact Assessments following local government elections in May 2017, induction. It is recognised that maintaining and improving consistency in the use of EqlAs is essential to ensuring the Council fulfils its equality responsibilities and the potential for training on this for officers and elected members will be kept under review.

Impact of Covid

The impact of the pandemic particularly on vulnerable communities, has reinforced the need for equality impact assessment, particularly in respect of proposals emerging in response to this. The need to continue to undertake assessments of proposal as part of any future recovery from the pandemic is also recognised.

2.10 Diversity Awareness in the Workplace

The Council's Strategic Workforce Plan "Working with You to Shape Stirling's Future" is refreshed annually when the Council's budget is set to reflect the latest achievements and challenges facing the Council and its workforce. This details the Council's commitment to:-

- Understanding our workforce requirements now and into the future.
- Ensuring our people have opportunities to develop the skills they will need
- Developing employee engagement opportunities so our people can influence the future.
- Continuing to develop a culture of continuous improvement and customer focus.

- 2.11 The Council continues to fulfil its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 by providing Equality and Diversity Training to all levels of employees. This takes the form of a 1-day classroom based Diversity course (currently delivered virtually), supplemented with a mandatory eLearning Equality and Diversity module on MyLo, the Council's self-service, web based, learning management system. It is mandatory for managers to attend the 1-day classroom Diversity course. Training opportunities generally continue to be supported by e-learning available to all employees through MyLo which gives employees access to booking and undertaking learning activities on any mobile device on a 24 hour, seven days a week basis.

2.12 Personal Review and Development (PRD)

The Council's Personal Review and Development (PRD) process provides all employees with the right to discuss and agree a fair and consistently applied review of their performance and behaviour with their manager and establish a Personal Development Plan. Council wide shared behaviours for all employees have been integrated into this process since 2015 and help promote and influence a culture of diversity awareness. These were developed by a working group of employees, are used in our recruitment process and contribute to promoting and influencing a culture of diversity awareness.

- 2.13 This process underwent review during 2018 and 2019 with feedback sought from staff and in consultation with Trade Unions with the Personal Growth and Development (PGD) framework launched in July 2019. This is designed to encourage meaningful and helpful discussions with employees in the areas of work activity, the Council's 'Think How' behaviours, health, safety and well-being, and learning and development. The framework consists of the core Stirling Council Strategic Outcomes and Vision, which is 'A Place for Everyone to Thrive'. Equality and Diversity is considered a fundamental aspect of this process and in rolling out the new PGD, we are taking steps to ensure that all staff across the Council, regardless of their role, have access to a meaningful discussion about their working lives and receive the support required to be happy and healthy at work. Work is under way to further develop the PGD framework for operational colleagues in recognition that a single format may not suit all members of our diverse workforce.

Impact of Covid

While Covid-19 had an initial impact across all areas within the HR & OD Service which incorporates Health & Safety and Risk and Resilience as well as Human Resources, Payroll and Organisational Development, staff quickly adapted to working from home. Changes to process were introduced to facilitate working from home with more information provided electronically to support these and Microsoft Teams enabling everyone to keep in contact with colleagues in their own and other Services. In terms of the Council meeting its Public Sector Equality duties the impact of Covid on these aspects of service delivery is therefore considered to have been minimal.

2.14 Community Engagement

The Council has maintained its good track record in supporting comprehensive, well developed engagement activity across Stirling's communities. This focuses on a wide range of issues and is an integral part of developing key policies and strategies. Communities are supported and encouraged to proactively set out their priorities, work locally to achieve these, and influence service provision through the development of local community plans. The Council introduced the use of Place Standard as a tool to support communities to identify their priorities with the effectiveness of this approach seen in the Education Scotland's inspection of Community Learning and Development (Feb 2018), which received a grading of Very Good for "support to communities."

- 2.15 Engagement activity is underpinned by community development support and is focussed on geographic communities, our service users, supporting equality organisations and ensuring that engagement activities are inclusive of Stirling's diverse communities. The Council supports specific organisations which represent the views of equality groups such as the Stirling Multi-Cultural Partnership and Stirling Area Access Panel. Links have also been established across service areas securing greater involvement of young people in key strategic developments.
- 2.16 Widening engagement in the Council's financial planning processes has continued with a move from Priority Based Budgeting (2017/18) to the development of a more transformational approach: "The Big Conversation" (2018/19). In 2017/18, the Council secured Scottish Government Community Choices funding and introduced Participatory Budgeting through a small grants events. 13 of the 19 successful projects awarded funding benefitted children, young people, older people, ethnic minority women, homelessness and people with a disability or addressed dementia, mental health and money advice provision. The Council subsequently introduced mainstream Participatory Budgeting involving citizens at all stages of the process and open to involvement of anyone of high school age upwards.
- 2.17 A review of the Council's Scheme of Establishment for Community Councils was completed in 2018 and 40 of the 43 Community Councils were reformed. The Scheme itself has made small but significant changes to the membership acknowledging the limitations and capacity of small, predominantly rural, settlements to form a community council
- 2.18 While previous work on test sites to explore new ways of working with community, private and statutory sectors has now ceased , new ways of working developed through that activity have been continued as follows :-
- The community steering group for the Models of Neighbourhood Care established in the Rural South West, is now a formal part of the neighbourhood care programme led by the Health & Social Care Partnership.
 - Community members from the Strathfillan area joined the Patient Forum in Killin and have developed a patient transport scheme.
 - Mercat Cross & City Centre Community Council contributed to the major strategic development of the City Deal.
 - Cowie Leadership Forum has developed an action plan to address social and physical regeneration in their community.
- 2.19 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is being delivered by the Council as a partner in the Stirling Community Planning Partnership through the creation of the Stirling Plan and development of Locality Action Plans. Eight Locality Action Plans have been finalised with partners also finalising a programme level Resource Plan based on the key themes identified in the Locality Action Plans with an emphasis on Covid recovery. The Council has also established processes to support delivery of other aspects of the Act, namely participation requests and asset transfer and while the number of participation requests and asset transfers

is still relatively small, these have been increasing. The need for continued progress in implementing the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is recognised and is a priority for the organisation.

- 2.20 Your Stirling: You Decide, the Council's mainstream participatory budgeting approach for 2019/20, was a significant engagement exercise involving officers from a number of services working with the community. Local people volunteered as Budget Delegates to work alongside the Project Team, and volunteers included people from "protected characteristic" groups and communities. The National Standards for Community Engagement were incorporated in the guidance for "Your Stirling: You Decide ". These standards have also been incorporated into the Council's Community Engagement Strategy. A digital engagement platform underpins delivery of the Strategy together with a framework for staff on engagement and participation practice.

Impact of Covid

The entire Community Development Team was redirected to establish the Council's Community Response to Covid-19. This involved working with other council services, local Third sector organisations and a range of local community response groups to ensure individuals and families had support to access food, medicines, befriending and other types of support. Although this was scaled down in August, team members have continued to provide support to individuals who have been asked to isolate through Test & Protect.

The Team has also provided support to a number of community organisations who own/manage facilities to either secure funding or have provided training opportunities relevant to opening their buildings. Team members continue to work from home and have been providing support to community organisations through appropriate digital platforms or by telephone.

Future working and the focus of the Community Development Team will be on the eight priority geographical areas within Stirling known to experience significantly poorer outcomes for their residents and with a Locality Action Plan.

2.21 Communications

Effective communication is fundamental to ensuring equality of access for our citizens and communities to our services. Information and publications provided by the Council can be made available on request in alternative languages and formats. Specific services also provide key information in alternative languages and formats where the need for this is already recognised. Translation and interpretation support is also available on request and can be provided in person if required.

- 2.22 The Council's website has been designed to be accessible for all and has been refreshed in accordance with the accessibility regulations for public sector bodies (The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018). These build on existing obligations within the Equality Act 2010 to people with a disability and require public sector websites and mobile apps to be fully accessible.

- 2.23 Text on the website can be translated using 'Google translate' and accessibility can be improved for users with visual impairment by enlarging the font size. A PDF screen reader has also been added to the website's functionality to enable users with visual impairment to read PDFs as text. According to Site Improve, the website has an accessibility rating of 95.2% considerably higher than the government benchmark level of 77.7% (Dec 2020). Site Improve is a highly regarded monitoring tool measuring accessibility standards against Web Content Accessibility Guidelines developed through the World Wide Web Consortium.

- 2.24 Where a Service is able to record a customer's preferred method of communication, this is used to help enable their participation and provide them with additional support. Some services, notably Revenue & Benefits, have also modified forms to include key symbols to help people with learning or communication difficulties. This Service also provides customers who have specific difficulties with a named adviser. For residents and visitors with hearing impairment, hearing loops have been installed in all Local Offices, Customer First, marriage rooms and the Council's cultural venues. Several services also have employees trained in sign language.
- 2.25 The Council's British Sign Language Plan 2018-2024 was published in late 2018 in English and in British Sign Language. This was developed by Council Services and partner organisations working together and in engagement with residents who use BSL and organisations supporting and working with them
- 2.26 Effective communication is critical in emergency situations. The Council as a "Category 1" responder must by law "maintain arrangements to warn the public and to provide information and advice to the public, if an emergency is likely to occur or has occurred". A variety of methods are used in these situations including:-
- Direct – face-to-face, door drop information, public address systems.
 - Online media and SMS – websites, social media, email and text messaging.
 - Media – local radio, television news and printed leaflets.
- Every effort is made to deliver information by a variety of methods to ensure as far as possible, that all needs are catered for. Use is also made of the British Red Cross 'Major Incident Response Multilingual Phrasebook' which is designed to assist in the early stages of an incident until a trained interpreter is available.
- 2.27 Plans to support Council services ensure they communicate and engage effectively with all our citizens and communities are being developed in a new Communications Strategy for 2021-23. This focusses on the wide range of methods available for engaging with our citizens and communities and aims to enable accessible communication for all.

Impact of Covid

During the Coronavirus Pandemic, the Council hosted permanent links to the easy-read and BSL versions of Government and NHS advice and guidance in relation to Covid-19 on the Council website. These remain in place on www.stirling.gov.uk/coronavirus and have been shared repeatedly on social media to a combined audience of more than 50,000 users. A Support for People post card was also created and distributed to every household across the Council area, which publicised details of the Council's contact number and support networks for those without access to digital media or with low digital literacy skills.

2.28 Customer Contact

Customer service is provided online, over the telephone 24/7 via the Council Contact Centre, and face-to-face at the Customer First office in the city centre, libraries and other Council office reception areas. Customer Services supports every citizen who chooses to contact the Council. Typically, services provided include taking payments, making bookings, logging requests such as missed bin collections, pothole repairs, faulty streetlights, and housing repairs from Council tenants. Information is also provided to customers together with signposting to other services including third party organisations.

- 2.29 Customer Services staff make use of translation services to support customers whose first language is not English. Council documents and forms can also be translated on request. To support deaf customers, particularly those who use British Sign Language, customer services staff are able to access '**contactSCOTLAND-BSL**' Scottish Government's BSL online

interpreting video relay service. This is a free service which allows BSL users to contact public sector services and for these services to contact them.

- 2.30 Work on the Council's Customer/Digital Programme commenced in summer 2019. This includes a new telephony system for the Contact Centre, replacement website and intranet. Work is also underway gathering requirements for the introduction of a Citizen Experience System which will replace the two Customer Relationship Management systems (CRM) currently in use across the organisation: Lagan and CoDo. Improvements increasing the stability of the Council's existing website have also been made until a replacement is procured and implemented.
- 2.31 A programme of coaching for the Team Leaders within the Customer Service area has been rolled out together with a coaching programme for Contact Centre advisers. Following a review of this programme it will be structured to accommodate the needs of all other customer service staff within the authority.

Impact of Covid

During the pandemic staff within the Contact Centre, Digital Team, 24/7 Emergency Team and Corporate Complaints Function have been enabled to work fully from home. Areas of the service normally providing direct face to face contact with the public including Receptions and Customer First, have been unable to deliver the same type and level of customer service and have adapted how they meet customers' needs for areas such as Registrars, Housing and Revenues and Benefits through contact by telephone and online platforms. This team has also led on proactive outbound calling, contacting residents potentially requiring support due to either "shielding" or temporarily isolating due to Covid-19.

2.32 Accessibility of Council Premises

The Property Asset Management Strategy and Delivery Plan approved in 2018, confirms the importance of our buildings to delivering services to all our communities. 89% of council buildings were suitable for and accessible to disabled people in 2019, confirming progress towards a target of 91%. Improving the Council's educational estate has continued with the Early Years Expansion Programme begun in 2019 due for completion in 2021. This programme provides major investment in our nurseries ensuring their accessibility for all who wish to use them.

- 2.33 Before carrying out major refurbishments of Council premises, consultation is undertaken with the community and service users to ensure that the proposals provide equality of access, do not discriminate against service users particularly those with a disability and comply with appropriate building standards. The Council's Infrastructure Delivery Team continues to work with operational services to ensure that buildings continue to support service delivery; making reasonable adjustments where required. Initial work has begun with a partnership approach, working in conjunction with the Stirling Access Panel to ensure full detailed assessments on accessibility of Council premises. Work has also begun on developing an improved template to be used for future assessments.

Impact of Covid

Due to the pandemic, assessments of Council premises normally carried out in discussion with a contact on site and in person inspection of the building concerned, were undertaken via a desktop review between March and August 2020. In person premises assessments were reinstated in August 2020 and are undertaken in accordance with Covid safe regulations and practice securing the safety of all personnel involved in these

2.34 Commissioning

All public procurement activity is required to meet the basic principles of transparency, accountability, fairness and proportionality. Procurement activity is carried out in a culture of fairness, as required by the Council's Contract Standing Orders, and is supported by standard contract documentation and guidance developed and maintained by the Strategic Commissioning Team. Operational procurement is largely devolved to procurement practitioners within Services supported by the Strategic Commissioning Team as required.

2.35 The Council's procurement documentation is regularly reviewed to meet the requirements of legislation and case law, and has been examined in the context of the Equality Act 2010 and supporting guidance issued by Scottish Procurement in December 2012 (SPPN 8/2012). All procurement documentation has been updated to meet the requirements of the following:-

- EU Directive 2014/24/EU, on public procurement
- EU Directives 2014/23/EU on the award of concession contracts
- Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014.
- The recommendations of the independent Review of Scottish Public Sector Procurement in Construction published by the Scottish Government in 2013.

Current documentation is therefore considered to be robust and equalities requirements are felt to be a key consideration in the Council's procurement activity.

2.36 To ensure equality considerations remain fully integrated into our activity, all requirements are aligned to the Council's Key Priorities and Considerations (2017) and the priorities of the Stirling Plan (2017-27). Procurement activity considers impacts on equalities, potential community benefit and sustainability. Services commissioned from the third sector and strategically funded organisations are subject to the procurement principles outlined above and are managed through contracts or Service Level Agreements with the organisations concerned. These arrangements vary in scale and style, and are subject to the review processes contained within the relevant agreement.

Impact of Covid

Covid-19 has required the Team to work from home with members readily adapting to these arrangements. The impact on the services delivered has been minimal as the processes supporting commissioning were predominantly already undertaken electronically. Team members have used Microsoft Teams to keep in contact with each other and colleagues in other Council Services.

2.37 Community Planning

The Stirling Plan (2017-27): Stirling's Community Planning Partnership's (CPP) Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP), describes how community planning partners will work collaboratively to promote fairness and tackle inequalities in the area over the next 10 years. The plan was produced collectively through the community planning partnership, community and voluntary groups and individuals active in their communities across the Council area. The desired outcomes are based on evidence about the inequalities that continue to persist in the area.

2.38 The focus of the Stirling Plan reflects the diversity of the Stirling Council area: its inequalities, the mix of urban and rural communities, rich heritage and environment, and a high level of community involvement and ambition. Equality considerations run through the strategic priorities of the Stirling Plan which recognises that for Stirling to be somewhere everyone can thrive, we need to act collectively to address the inequalities between our most and least deprived citizens and communities. The plan makes a clear commitment to focus resources on addressing the root causes and not just the symptoms of inequalities.

- 2.39 Inclusive Growth is one of the key focuses of the Stirling Plan. The ambition of inclusive growth is about rebalancing our economy with a targeted focus on reducing inequalities. The Council and its Community Planning Partners want to ensure growth is inclusive and does not simply pass many people and places by. Under the Plan, shared efforts will be targeted at reducing the stark inequalities that exist between communities in Stirling. The Plan will also shift the Partnership's collective focus to ensure that individuals, families and communities experiencing the greatest disadvantage benefit from increased prosperity as the result of a fairer economy.
- 2.40 The CPP has developed eight Locality Action Plans that focus on geographical areas within Stirling known to experience significantly poorer outcomes for the people that live there. These plans were developed in partnership with community members, groups and partner agencies with a programme level Resource Plan now being developed to outline the priority activity that will be delivered to address the inequality issues identified within the Plans. The CPP Executive Board will oversee progress against these plans.

Impact of Covid

Research suggests that COVID-19 will increase poverty across Scotland and is very likely to result in a greater number of people being faced with financial worries as well as physical and mental health difficulties due to job loss, reduced income, and isolation and for some illness. For people already experiencing inequality and poverty, the impact is likely to be greater. The Locality Action Plans were reviewed through a COVID lens with all issues continuing to be relevant. COVID is causing more people to potentially become vulnerable to negative life events and emphasises the need for services and communities to work together to support people when they need it most.

2.41 Welfare Reform

Universal Credit full-service was rolled out in Stirling in June 2017. The Council and its partners continue to monitor and respond to the impact of welfare reforms on communities and on Council and partners' services. They continue working together to seek better ways of jointly supporting our most vulnerable residents affected by these reforms, and to build skills and capacity for those who are digitally or otherwise excluded, to help them deal with their changing circumstances.

- 2.42 The Universal Credit Operational Delivery Group (ODG), jointly chaired by Stirling Council and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), was established to prepare claimants for the roll out of Universal Credit in Stirling. This initially comprised representatives from Stirling Council, DWP and local Housing Associations; but was opened up to include voluntary sector partners from summer 2017. Following establishment of a Universal Credit Customer Representative Group and a Landlords Forum by the DWP, membership of the ODG was revised in 2018. Membership of the ODG is now limited to the DWP and Stirling Council Teams including: Advice Services, Revenues and Benefits; Housing; Libraries; Employability; Social Work; and Education. This ensures that all partners affected by the delivery of universal credit have a group to feed into and can discuss issues and receive updates from the DWP; without duplication of meetings.

Impact of Covid

The pandemic combined with delayed roll out of Universal Credit migration and staffing changes within the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has resulted in Universal Credit Operational Delivery Group (ODG) being unable to meet in 2020.

2.43 Refugee Support

The Council continues to contribute to Scotland's response to the Syrian refugee crisis and delivers a programme with Community Planning partners, to resettle Syrian and Sudanese Refugees in the area. A programme of support and integration is in place, led by a designated Lead Officer and a Support and Integration Officer with specialist support provided by a dedicated ESOL Coordinator and Money, Benefits and Debt Advisor. Support provided includes English language tuition incorporating life skills, information technology and employability. Benefits support and advice is delivered by the Council's Advice Services, assistance with health appointments and integration into nursery and school for children including additional learning and language support are also provided. Third sector partners engaged in the programme offer support which includes befriending, coordination of community donations and offers of assistance.

2.44 Six families have been resettled under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and five families under the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (35 individuals in total). The Council aims to resettle between four to six families annually under these schemes and will continue to resettle refugees under the Global Resettlement Scheme which is due to replace the current schemes.

Impact of Covid

Refugee Resettlement Schemes have been suspended since 31 March 2020 and the Council has been unable to meet its target number of resettlements for 2020 and unlikely to do so in 2021. A partial lifting of resettlement activity under the Syrian Resettlement Scheme is at best expected to enable the Council to resettle one more family under this scheme

2.45 City Region Deal

Stirling Council, in partnership with Clackmannanshire Council and the University of Stirling, has secured investment from the Scottish and UK Governments totalling £90.2m, in the form of a City Region Deal (CRD), covering both Council areas. Structured to provide investment through a series of projects in Innovation, Digital, Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Active Travel and Connectivity projects over the next 10 to 15 years, this will act as a catalyst to unlock substantial additional investment from respective Councils, the University and the private sector aimed at generating inclusive economic growth for the area.

2.46 The Council's City Region Deal Team works with partners and the private sector to:

- Shape the Business Cases required to access the investment for component projects.
- Develop and drive the implementation and delivery plans for these and
- Develop and monitor the societal and economic benefits anticipated

Strategic development work has continued on equalities, inclusive growth impacts and suggested targets for these. Work has progressed on the "Benefits Realisation" anticipated from projects and partner organisations and key services have participated in Equalities and Human Rights training. The Skills and Inclusion project has progressed with recruitment of inclusion workers underway and employability skills pathways under development. This project will enable those furthest from the labour market to begin progression along the Employability Pipeline in readiness for employment opportunities arising from City Region Deal projects.

Impact of Covid

Whilst the pandemic has resulted in an inevitable delay, particularly in capital projects within the City Region Deal, it remains key to the recovery of the regional economy.

3.0 MAINSTREAMING EQUALITY INTO SERVICE DELIVERY

INTRODUCTION

The following sections confirm how the Council continues to mainstream equality when delivering services to individuals and communities. Departments and the services they deliver are considered in a similar order to that presented in the 2019 Mainstreaming Report.

3.1 ECONOMIC GROWTH, TOURISM, CULTURE AND EVENTS

The Economic Growth, Tourism, Culture and Events Service leads on delivering sustainable and inclusive economic growth for all of Stirling - working towards achieving the Council's overarching vision of Stirling: A place for everyone to thrive. The Service works in close partnership with industry and key partners to offer a positive and responsive service to our businesses and communities. Its approach is to be proactive and highly visible across the entire Council area, tailoring support and interventions to each community, business and sector through .with specific activities and interventions to promote economic recovery and future growth. Core areas of activity include:

- **Business, Investment and Sector Support** - working in partnership with partners and businesses to re-shape business and sector support to focus on recovery and growth
- **Infrastructure Development** – delivery of infrastructure projects to support growth and activity

Impact of Covid

Covid-19 has had a major impact on service delivery. In response, the Service on behalf of the Council is has worked with all business support agencies in Stirling as part of the Economic Recovery Partnership. Activity undertaken has included a dedicated telephone helpline and online support for businesses providing advice on guidance, financial support and opportunities around local supply chain and recruitment. Financial has also been provided through the processing and awarding of business support grants for businesses affected by Covid-19.

A revised Economic Development Strategy is being progressed which takes into account the impact of Covid-19 on the economy and future implications.

3.2 Learning and Employability

The Learning and Employability Team continues to work with vulnerable people aged 16+ years who face multiple barriers to participation in society. The work of the team targets those who are unemployed, people with a health conditions including mental health issues, those with physical disabilities, learning disabilities or learning difficulties, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, young people aged 16-25 and lone parents. In 2019 we continued to see an increase in the number of participants securing employment rising from 222 in 2018 to 270 people in 2019.

3.3 The team continues to provide access to programmes which develop participant's confidence and self-esteem, improves wider wellbeing including mental health, increases core skills and participation in accredited learning opportunities and provide access to a range of employability supports that help people to move in to employment.

3.4 Programmes provided include Adult Literacy and Numeracy, English for speakers of other languages, Information Communication Technology (ICT), Personal Development and Confidence Building, Family learning opportunities, Cooking Skills and Languages. Programmes specifically aimed at improving an individual's employment prospects include Modern Apprenticeships, Employability Fund, SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) Core

Skills, ASDAN Employability and Towards Independence modules, Supported Employment, Fair Start Scotland, Learning Employability and Progression (LEAP Stirling), 1 to 1 Client Support and volunteering opportunities. In addition, Learning and Employability have developed The Fair Work Incentive, part of the No One Left Behind funding from the Scottish Government for local delivery.

- 3.5 In 2019, 1334 participants accessed the service gaining support to develop their skills, confidence and wellbeing as follows:-
- 723 people participated in wider learning opportunities including adult literacy and numeracy, ESOL, ICT, wider community, family and accredited learning opportunities and programmes supporting those with communication difficulties.
 - 611 participants received employability support through Fair Start Scotland, LEAP Stirling, Modern Apprenticeships, Employability Fund and employer incentive programmes.
 - 270 people were successfully supported into work.
- 3.6 The team has further developed its support for those from a minority ethnic background. ESOL programmes continue to support English language learning and the team has worked to integrate participants from the Refugee Resettlement Programme into wider learning and employability provision helping individual's progression into further learning and work.
- 3.7 Through employer engagement activity, the team work with local employers to help match the skills needs of their local business to the development of bespoke employability learning programmes for local people. This improves work placement and paid employment opportunities for vulnerable clients who otherwise may find it difficult to enter the local labour market. In partnership with the Councils Strategic Commissioning Team, work has been undertaken examining the range of community benefits which can be identifies through contract work awarded to local employers which can provide bespoke opportunities for our participants.
- 3.8 The Learning and Employability Team also continues to work with local internal and external partners to enhance the range of support vulnerable participants can access in their time with the service. This includes support from the Council's Advice Services Team, NHS Forth Valley, Active Stirling, and Action in Mind, Recyke a Bike, Stirling Community Enterprise, and Artlink Central Limited. These partnerships extend the learning available to participants and include opportunities which can improve their health and physical activity, their mental health through counselling, and support access to additional accredited opportunities such as First Aid at Work and elementary food hygiene and crucially debt and money advice.

Impact of Covid

As a result of COVID 19 all of the services provided by the Learning and Employability Team moved online providing support via video calls, e-mails or telephone calls. The move to this form of support was been difficult for some of the most vulnerable service users and for some quite isolating, with the loss of the in person support of staff and fellow participants which had previously had a positive impact on their wellbeing.

Concerns about individual participants' wider health and wellbeing were addressed by increased weekly contact aimed at reducing some of the isolation felt by participants. For some, digital connectivity has been an issue where participants have not had access to devices or data to support their learning or employability journey. This has been overcome in part by accessing devices and data through the Connecting Scotland programme which has provided some of the most vulnerable participants with access to a chrome book or iPad and a monthly data allowance to support their participation.

3.9 Advice Services

The Advice Services Team provides information and advice to help individuals and families, and in turn communities; develop skills and understanding to manage their finances, increase their financial resilience and tackle digital exclusion. The service works to prevent or relieve poverty by providing advice on welfare benefits, financial inclusion, income maximisation, money and debt management, digital inclusion and housing. It also provides advice, advocacy and representation to any member of the public who requires it. Advice is also provided to clients with cancer and other long-term conditions through a specialist service adopted and approved by Macmillan Cancer Support.

3.10 The service promotes equality and diversity by delivering barrier free services, which recognise client choice, language skills, communication needs, and the impact of any disability an individual may have. Services provided are available to all residents of Stirling regardless of circumstance, gender, ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability or age, but also specifically aim to be responsive to the needs of minority and hard to reach groups and individuals and groups requiring additional support.

Impact of Covid

With the exception of in person appointments, outreach and home visits, full service has continued to be provided by the Advice Service Team with advice delivered either over the telephone or by email. The Team also extended service delivery channels to include web-chat and digital platforms, including Google Classrooms, MS Teams and Attend Anywhere/Near Me.

From October 2020, office appointments could be arranged for vulnerable clients where it was not possible to provide advice through any alternative means. These were available at Raploch Community Campus which is fully accessible with associated parking, including disabled parking provision and supported by full risk assessments and social distancing in place for the safety of clients and staff.

3.11 Culture and Events

The Culture and Events Team provides cultural opportunities and experiences for a wide range of groups across its venues. Groups catered for range from young carers, young people and adults with disabilities, older people and their carers, women and members of ethnic minority communities. In addition, a range of targeted opportunities is provided for young people and adults to participate in the arts and music. Those designed for children and young people in particular, aim to break down barriers to participation and build individual confidence and self-esteem. Current opportunities include:

- Rural Music Project – for young people over 12years old who have had little or no previous access to music and the arts and aims to encourage participants' personal development by building their confidence and self-esteem. The project goes out to communities as there is a recognition that transport can be an issue in many rural areas including the Eastern villages of the Council area.
- City Music Project – this outreach project works in three High Schools: St Modan's (Autism Base), Bannockburn (through pupil support with young people with poor school attendance) and Chartershall (specialised provision for young people with social, emotional and behaviour needs).
- Scots Song outreach programme – this annual project reaches young people across Stirling Primary Schools.
- Support to PLUS – a targeted arts programme funded through the European Championships Cultural Programme Community Fund. PLUS is a Forth Valley based charity providing support for children, young people and young adults with a disability and their families).

- Work with Includem - a partnership between Includem and the Scottish Music Centre to run music activities for care-experienced young people in the Tollbooth
- Music workshops with Stirling Young Carers.

3.12 The service has improved accessibility of its premises through the following:

- Installation of lifts in the Tolbooth, Albert Halls and Cowane Centre.
- Evacuchair training for venues staff.
- Staff awareness of promoting the availability of induction loop systems in Council venues and BSL awareness.
- Improvements to the accessibility of the Albert Halls including improved signage, a new lift mirror to assist wheelchair users and improved toilet facilities.

3.13 The Team has a good working relationship with Start Up Stirling – a local charity assisting and supporting families and individuals experiencing homelessness and financial hardship. The team works with a local Theatre company who support and engage with actors with additional needs and has also supported employment placements for young people and adults in partnership with the Councils Learning and Employability Team, the flexible pathways programme operated in our High Schools, the Autism Society and Forth Valley College. The focus of these activities is on increasing individuals' skills and knowledge and to build their confidence to help improve their future employment prospects.

3.14 The Team engaged with the Stirling Area Access Panel to obtain advice on improving accessibility at events and encouraging attendance at these for adults and young people with a range of support needs. This approach was successfully used in respect of the 2018 and 2019 Hogmanay events with a Changing Places toilet facility introduced for 2019 and improvements made to the viewing area for customers with a disability at the Christmas Lights Switch On in 2019.

Impact of Covid

All large scale events for summer 2020 were cancelled in line with Scottish Government guidance. The Science and Halloween festival programmes were delivered digitally with the exception of an exhibition in the Tolbooth gallery. The Hogmanay event for 2020 had no audience and consisted of online programming and a fireworks display which could be viewed from residents' gardens. The Council's general cultural programme, community quiz, workshops and classes in Council venues were delivered either live online or as pre-recorded material.

The Culture and Events Team has carried out an audience survey and will take into account specific measures that people feel will be required before returning to live shows and events. The survey also asked if there were any support requirements that should be taken into consideration in planning future events.

3.15 Libraries & Archive

Libraries are at the heart of our communities and play a key role in the social, economic, health and educational wellbeing of our residents by offering accessible and inclusive services and providing support and guidance to library members in relation to their information needs. They also seek to enrich individuals' lives through the experience of reading. In addition to borrowing a range of materials including books, talking books, CDs and DVDs, library users have free access to the Internet using our computers or Wi-Fi connections.

- 3.16 A comprehensive range of materials and services are available online 24/7, including free e-books, e-magazines, e-newspapers, e-audio books, online reference resources and our online catalogue where library members can manage their account and renew and reserve items for collection free of charge. Materials are available in a range of languages and formats and can be delivered directly to the homes of housebound library members. A range of events are delivered throughout the year, to engage communities in shared reading experiences, heritage, culture, information provision and debate.
- 3.17 Libraries work in partnership with a wide variety of organisations to maximise the range and quality of services they offered. Library staff are trained to signpost individuals to other council services, external organisations and specialist information sources providing support for individuals to access information on areas such as welfare reform, employability and careers advice, health and wellbeing, digital inclusion and literacy.
- 3.18 Initiatives to improve equality of access for library users include:-
- Materials provided in electronic format for visually impaired members with options for increased font sizes, zoom & scrollable pages, text-to-speech or spoken word.
 - Zoomtext specialist software (recommended by the Royal National Institute of Blind People) available on PCs in two libraries with software available elsewhere on request.
 - Digital inclusion activity - training, support and advice sessions to support improved access to online information and services. Council Growth Monies have funded a Digital Inclusion Officer and a Digital Volunteer Co-ordinator for a further year until the end of March 2021.
 - The Digital Inclusion Officer is supporting 17 individuals eligible for a free Wi-Fi-enabled tablet from Connect Scotland, helping them virtually to use the device and enhance their skills. Groups included are refugees, housebound readers and the reading group at Raploch Campus.
 - A pilot project developed in partnership with NHS Education for Scotland (NES), providing a tailored programme of training and support to expand the role of libraries in promoting health and well-being in communities.
 - A pilot Reading Friends project pairing volunteers with Reading Partners. This project aims to combat social isolation and maintain the reading habit for those who, because of visual impairments or other difficulties, cannot easily read themselves.
 - Work with the Council's Support and Integration Officer for Refugee Resettlement and refugee group to encourage digital participation through support and training.

Impact of Covid

Stirling Libraries closed on March 17 2020 in accordance with national guidance. Since then online services have been hugely popular with 22,293 library eBooks issued between 17 March and 31 October. All Stirling Library e-resources are available free of charge and more titles have been added to meet demand. A huge range of magazines and newspapers are also available online including all popular full-text daily newspapers. The use of both e-books and e-newspapers use has increased by over 200% on normal figures.

Since 15 July 2020 when libraries were able to re-open under Scottish Government guidance, Stirling Libraries have offered a Select and Collect service from all libraries and mobiles as well as the Housebound service. A gradual programme of re-opening libraries for browsing and computer use began in November with Central Library and Dunblane Library opening on 11 and 12 November respectively. With the advent of Tier 4 restrictions this roll-out paused but Select and Collect and Housebound services have continued.

3.19 Registrars

Registration Services are provided for those in heterosexual and same sex relationships, for example birth registrations can now take place with same sex as well as opposite sex parents. Naming ceremonies are also offered to include recently fostered or adopted children to welcome them into their family. Both same sex and opposite sex couples can have ceremonies for Marriage, with Civil Partnership ceremonies available for same sex couples. Same Sex Marriage went 'live' in Scotland on 16th December 2014 and this also offers the opportunity for couples to change their Civil Partnership to marriage by opting to do this via the administrative route or having another ceremony. A Renewal of Vows Ceremony is also offered to both heterosexual and same sex couples.

- 3.20 Citizenship Ceremonies take place every two months, with the Provost or a Council Baillie attending in an effort to make our newest citizens feel welcomed and accepted in our community. The Lieutenant or Depute Lieutenant is also always invited to these ceremonies and attends when possible. Interpreters are welcomed at marriage and civil partnership ceremonies for the benefit of the couple concerned and their non-English speaking guests, but require to be provided at their expense.

Impact of Covid

Due to social distancing restriction, Citizenship Ceremonies are only available on an individual basis with group ceremonies no longer an option and no attendance by dignitaries possible. Many Marriage/Civil Partnership ceremonies arranged for 2020 have either been postponed or cancelled with attendees at any ceremony which has taken place limited in accordance with prevailing regulations. Non-statutory ceremonies such as Naming Ceremonies or Renewal of Vows have been withdrawn until further notice.

3.21 Sport, Physical Activity & Healthy Living

Facilities and services for the provision and development of sport, physical activity and healthy living in the Stirling Council area are currently provided by Active Stirling Ltd on behalf of the Council, and in collaboration with a range of partners. Active Stirling Ltd is a leisure trust established as a company limited by guarantee with charitable trust status in 2006.

- 3.22 Stirling Council and Active Stirling are committed to providing opportunities and supporting access to physical activity and sport for all. They want to improve the health and well-being of all of Stirling's communities by providing opportunities which remove barriers and encourage increased participation in sport and physical activity, particularly amongst under-represented groups and people with protected characteristics. This includes but is not limited to health and fitness memberships, health and fitness classes, walking groups, exercise referrals and targeted health and well-being programmes.
- 3.23 The Council wants the Stirling area to be the best place to be active and aims to change lives through sport and physical activity. In pursuit of this ambition, a refreshed Sport, Physical Activity and Healthy Living Strategy (2018-27) was approved in September 2018. Developed in consultation with partner organisations, and building on previous consultation with local communities, the strategy aligns with the outcomes in the Stirling Plan (2017-27). It recognises that to ensure Stirling remains a place where everyone can thrive, we need to work in partnership to keep the active active ; get the inactive active, and support those who may be in the greatest need, to equally share in the benefits of participating in sport and physical activity.

- 3.24 The Strategy will be delivered within the context of people being active and eating well, as a means of tackling poverty and inequality locally and recognises that for particular groups, individuals and communities achieving this will require targeted effort and support. The strategy outlines four high level priorities and associated actions as key to delivering the shared vision of more active and healthier communities as follows:
- Schools and Education
 - Club and Community Physical Activity and Sport.
 - Active and Healthy Lifestyles.
 - Profile, Places and Environments.
- 3.25 The Council is currently establishing long term arrangements for the future delivery of its leisure services to meet the aspirations of the Sport, Physical Activity and Healthy Living Strategy. The Council and Active Stirling have agreed a new partnership for delivery of these incorporating the aims, priorities and actions of the Strategy into the proposed contractual relationships with sport and physical activity providers including Active Stirling Ltd.
- 3.26 Disability Sport**
- Active Stirling ensures participation and progression in sport for people with a disability by connecting individuals to the appropriate sport club or governing body programme. It also works in partnership with Scottish Disability Sport, other sports governing bodies and a network of clubs affiliated to Club Sport Stirling to help individuals participate and progress in their chosen sport. Active Stirling is a member of the strategic partnership for disability sport across Forth Valley, along with Clackmannanshire Council, Falkirk Community Trust, **sportscotland**, Scottish Disability Sport and Forth Valley Disability Sport which hold partners accountable for the provision of opportunities and progression in sport for people with disabilities.
- 3.27 Active Stirling delivers a wide range of activities and support for individuals with disabilities at a range of levels with school activity including:
- Specialist classes such as swimming within The PEAK and High School estate.
 - Inclusive extra-curricular provision - Active Schools Coordinators are the contact point for disability enquiries and through consultation match individuals into the relevant physical activity or sport opportunity with 19 events for disability sport held in 2018/19 academic year calendar of events.
 - Engagement of the Active Schools team with ASN units (Additional Support Needs) across the area including three primary school and four High School units to support pupils in accessing opportunities.
- 3.28 The Community Activation Team within Active Stirling works to bring about positive change for individuals through their participation in physical activity and sport. It offers support and help to individuals, communities and clubs to consider and engage with physical activity and sport by designing programmes that help break down barriers to participation. The team works a wide variety of partners and community groups including, NHS Forth Valley, **Sportscotland**, Stroke Association, Forth Valley Recovery Community, Care Homes and Central Scotland Islamic Centre to support individuals overcome barriers to participating in physical activity or sport and access relevant opportunities.
- 3.29 Active Stirling continues to work in partnership with PLUS to offer training to Modern Apprentices, coaches and volunteers. PLUS also delivers specialised training for Active Stirling's own workforce enabling it to support people with a disability. (PLUS is a charity supporting children, young people and adults with disabilities and additional support needs and their families operating across the Forth Valley area.)

- 3.30 Active Stirling continues to host and support events on a national and international scale. Examples of such events included the Scottish Wheelchair Basketball Play Off finals in May 2018, Stirling Wheelchair Curling International Invitational event in October 2018 and the World Wheelchair Curling Championships at Stirling Sports Village in March 2019. To ensure facilities are as inclusive as possible in partnership with Stirling Council, Active Stirling is installing a Changing Places facility in the Peak providing further space and assistance for individuals with a disability who find it difficult to use standard accessible toilet and changing facilities.

Impact of Covid

Delivering on the Sport Physical Activity and Healthy Living Strategy has been severely curtailed in 2020 due to the impact of the pandemic and national and local restrictions on activity. The leisure sector was effectively locked down for six months and delivery subsequently curtailed due to requirements for social distancing, cleansing and further constraints on adult group activity. Whilst some elements of the strategy have been delivered at a reduced level, namely for children, young people and professional sports, the majority of community based work has not been permitted to take place. The Delivery Plan for the Strategy will therefore be reviewed in early 2021 in response to the consequences of the pandemic

Industry estimates are that the earliest the sector may return to full capacity is September 2021, but with many predicting 2022 as more likely. Providers, including Active Stirling are comprehensively reviewing their business and operational models to try to retain financial solvency. The Council will continue to work in partnership with providers and other partners to ensure equitable access to sport and physical activity for all its communities within this challenging environment.

4.0 HOUSING

- 4.1 Equality is incorporated into all new housing policies and procedures. The Housing Allocations policy ensures access to housing is open to any applicant over 16 years old. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires that tenants are widely consulted on all policy changes. Where meetings and focus groups are run, transport and crèches are arranged to maximise participation and ensure these are accessible for all. Tenants are represented on the Housing Advisory Group (HAG), an elected member and officer group directly involved in consultations and discussions on the direction of the Housing Service. Tenants can also participate via a range of methods including membership of being the Tenants' Panel and Tenants' Voices: groups of tenants regularly involved in consultations.
- 4.2 The Service also funds an independent Tenant Participation (TP) Officer who encourages participation from people who find it difficult to get involved to ensure the views of all service users are gathered, with particular efforts made to capture the views of homeless and young people. Participation is also encouraged within the Sheltered Housing complex (Kelly Court) to enable older tenants to be involved in the decision making process and interact with each other. The Service consults with all tenants each year concerning any proposed rent increase through a rent forum meeting and a questionnaire issued via the regular tenants' newsletter "Open Door" with the results of these consultations reported to Council as part of the subsequent decision making process.
- 4.3 People can access services through a variety of communication routes including e-mail, text messaging, telephone, face to face contact, and home and office interviews. All documents produced by the service are available in Braille, various languages or large print and are available in audio format on request. An interpretation service is also available. Customers' preferred methods of communication can be recorded on the service's ICT system to help maximise participation and provide additional support where required. For those who are less able to read, a comprehensive information DVD is provided to all new tenants which can also be translated into several languages.

4.4 Housing for specific groups

The service supports specific communities and individuals identifying as members of protected characteristics groups in a range of ways, including established links with the Justice Service and Scottish Prison Service. Contacts for each Scottish Prison Service establishment support delivery of early housing options advice in conjunction with the Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone (SHORE) standards.

- 4.5 The service works closely with the Gypsy/Traveller community in Stirling and provides a range of support to help them sustain their tenancies. The Independent Tenant Participation Officer visits the site regularly and supports residents promoting their engagement in the development of Housing and other services provided by the council and others such as NHS Forth Valley. The Site Warden continues to support local people to access NHS services, schools, Job Centre Plus and other Council services. Wider involvement by members of the gypsy / traveller community is also encouraged through attendance at events and conferences such as the Creating Better Places for Scotland's Gypsy/Traveller Community Conference held annually in October.
- 4.6 The Council has been awarded £85,000 funding from Scottish Government's £2m Additional Capital Funding in 2020/21 for Improvements to Public Sector Gypsy/Traveller Sites. This has been provided to Local Authorities in order to create an opportunity to rebuild trust with the Gypsy/Traveller community and in particular support improved quality of life for members of this community with additional protected characteristics, including children and older people. The outcomes the project is seeking to achieve are as follows:

- Improved quality of life for residents of Gypsy/Traveller sites;
 - Improved facilities or access for people with protected characteristics or additional vulnerabilities, including older people, disabled people and children;
 - Immediate improvements to site quality, which benefit Gypsy/Travellers quickly and have a sustained impact;
 - Improved relationships between the Local Authority and site residents and learning from and about community engagement approaches that have worked to develop and agree projects; and
 - Improved confidence within the Gypsy/Traveller Community that the Action Plan will result in change and that they have meaningful influence over decisions that affect them locally.
- 4.7 The Council is currently engaging with the Gypsy/Traveller Community on the outcomes of the project and initial consultation has proposed updated facilities onsite to gauge if the residents agree that this is a key outcome for improvement. The Service has secured a number of iPads, Chromebooks and Wi-Fi devices for the Bridge End site from Connecting Scotland. These will be distributed to residents and the Service will engage with individuals to improve their digital skills and provide access to educational opportunities. A longer term goal, in consultation with the residents, is to examine upgrading Wi-Fi connectivity in the site.
- 4.8 The Service will continue to consult with the Gypsy/ Traveller Community to establish what improvements they would like made on site and in the services they receive, and will discuss all options with them before proceeding with any future investment and improvement. Regular monthly drop-in sessions in place to provide support to residents were suspended as a result of Covid-19 but will resume as soon as restrictions allow. These were routinely attended representatives from Housing Services, social services, education, Income Maximisation and the Council's repairs and maintenance service. Tenants are consulted annually as part of the Council's rent consultation process and tenant satisfaction survey and encouraging more engagement and participation with and by this community remains a key priority for the service.
- 4.9 The Service is a member Positive Action in Housing Ltd, a Scottish-wide charity working with communities, housing providers, voluntary organisations and faith groups offering advice and information and support to new migrants, refugees and minority ethnic communities.
- 4.10 Housing Service continues to help people remain in their own homes for as long as possible and during 2019/20 made 583 adaptations in properties to enable people living in private sector accommodation to remain in their homes (80 major adaptations through the Private Sector Housing Grant Scheme, 503 minor adaptations / repairs through the Care & Repair Scheme). 40 major adaptations were made to tenants' homes, enabling older people and people with disabilities to remain resident in their community. The service considers cultural issues when carrying out adaptations, such as installing showers rather than baths (which is normal practice) for certain religious groups. In addition, the repairs service operates an appointment system enabling requests for a particular gender of visiting trades operative to be met.
- 4.11 The Service is actively involved with the Clackmannanshire and Stirling Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP) planning and developing future services and support to meet people's needs and is implementing the findings of Stirling University research " Housing and Ageing" This links strategy to future service delivery and contains key recommendation for future housing for older people. The Service also works closely with Reablement, Intermediate care and Telecare services enabling older people to achieve more independent living in later life. These services continue to support as many people to live as independently at home as possible by providing timely and appropriate support. They are also working to provide improved community based palliative care to allow people who near the end of their lives to be in the place they wish to be cared for and, where practical, to die where they choose.

- 4.12 Housing Service continues to work with partners including the Salvation Army, NHS, Loretto Care and Third Sector organisations to provide support to vulnerable people. The Council in partnership with others, also provides 13 spaces for individuals fleeing domestic abuse, including five spaces in the Council's rural area.
- 4.13 A cross service Working Group has also been established to improve the range of accommodation and support available to care leavers and other young people. This is exploring temporary accommodation options for young people leaving care, with the aim of developing more tailored accommodation options, such as increased supported accommodation. The Youth Homelessness Support Service provides housing support to particularly vulnerable young people aged 16-25 years at The Bridge Project in Stirling.
- 4.14 The Service funds an Empty Homes Officer post to provide information and practical assistance to empty home owners. This work also supports people who may be vulnerable due to age or ill-health or struggling with the burden of how to bring an older empty property up to current standards and back into use. The service has assisted in returning 70 empty properties back into use for much needed housing in 2019/20, bringing the total to 378 properties since 2013/14.
- 4.15 The Steering Group for the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) meets regularly to achieve the vision for Stirling that: "Homeless people in Stirling will access settled housing as a first priority and a faster rate, with flexible housing support services which meet the unique needs of each person". The plan aims to house homeless people in permanent accommodation as quickly as possible, reducing the need for time spent in temporary accommodation. This work includes developing our "Housing First" approach locally to supporting people with very complex needs to access permanent housing and simultaneously provide the wraparound support they need to be able to remain at home and sustain their tenancy.
- 4.16 Stirling is one of five cities selected to take part in the Pathfinder for Housing First in Scotland and currently has 10 clients to be housed in Housing First tenancies in the community. Forth Housing Association, has provided the initial 10 units of accommodation for this project and have agreed to allocate a total of 20 tenancies to the project. A further 10 applicants for the remaining tenancies who will require support under the scheme have been identified but progress on these has been affected the pandemic. The goal of the Council through the RRTP is to expand this approach more widely, supported by a multiagency approach providing wraparound support to achieve settled outcomes for homeless clients.
- 4.17 We continue to work closely with partners including Social Services, Police Scotland and the Alcohol and Drug Partnership to share ideas and consider joint initiatives in relation to addressing drug and alcohol misuse. Briefings have been delivered for staff in Housing, Criminal Justice, and Social Services on drug and alcohol issues in Stirling and across Scotland and we continue to share ideas from practitioners and other Local Authorities about those currently at risk of harm from drug and alcohol misuse.
- 4.18 A mobile harm reduction service attends Springkerse House in Stirling four times a week to support individuals and staff and raise awareness of the range of advice and assistance available around harm reduction. Individuals can exchange needles, be assessed for support for alcohol and drug addictions and receive support during these sessions. The Service has also conducted Naloxone and overdose training for staff at Springkerse House and continues to survey tenants about their access to GP services to examine support for this vulnerable group. Staff are able to recognise when a tenant has overdosed, follow procedures, administer first aid and take guidance from emergency services when required.

- 4.19 Staff across the service continue to undergo Diversity, Child Protection and Vulnerable Adult Protection, Hidden Carers, and Alcohol Awareness training. Toolbox Talks have also taken place throughout 2019/20 for trades' operatives raising awareness about domestic abuse and adult support and protection. Several Housing Managers have completed the SVQ in Health and Social Care (Adults) Level 4 and all Housing Support workers within the Homelessness Team have completed the Chartered Institute of Housing Level 2 Certificate in Housing Practice. The majority of senior managers and team leaders have also completed Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) training. Staff have been issued with the Scottish Social Services Council Code of Practice (SSSC) and are aware of the National Care Standards ensuring that all staff have the appropriate skills and knowledge necessary to participate in housing related activities.
- 4.20 Housing has a robust approach to promoting equality of opportunity within the workplace and efforts have been made to recruit trainees from disadvantaged backgrounds and younger employees. The service employs a trainee from Positive Action for Training in Housing (PATH Scotland), which supports people from ethnic minority backgrounds seeking employment in Housing Services and Housing Associations.

Impact of Covid

The Housing Service suspended all non-essential repairs from March 2020 and again in November 2020. All face-to-face contact with tenants and service users have been kept to a minimum (except for essential repairs, as above) and rent payments were restricted to payments online, by phone and via PayPoint. All legal action for rent recovery and anti-social behaviour was suspended in response to guidance from the Scottish Government.

Delivery of statutory responsibilities in relation to Homelessness has been maintained by adapting processes for all contact with service users, homeless applicants have continued to contact the Council for assistance and the Service has continued to provide temporary accommodation. Pressure on temporary accommodation has increased since March 2020, due to a combination of increased demand for this and delays in preparing and allocating vacant properties for permanent lettings.

Services restricted from March 2020 include estate management and inspection, housing allocations, tenant participation activities, information request responses, the housing development programme and investment works. These have subsequently been reinstated with online working, telephone contact and social distancing standard practice. The allocations service also developed protocols to enable prospective tenants to view properties online. Planned maintenance, mutual exchanges, termination of tenancy inspections, garden assistance and grounds maintenance were suspended at the onset of the pandemic and were beginning to restart until the introduction of Level 4 restrictions limiting progress on these activities

Housing offices continue to be closed to tenants, with staff working from home whenever possible or on rotation in the office to share work that must be undertaken on site. Social distancing arrangements have been introduced and staff have made greater use of telephone and online working as far as possible. Service delivery will continue to be impacted by the pandemic, with the Service planning to resume all operations as soon as permissible.

5.0 SAFER COMMUNITIES

5.1 Community Justice

The Stirling Community Justice Partnership Board (SCJPB) leads on community justice outcomes. This comprises local senior representatives from the designated statutory organisations named in the Community Justice (Scotland) Act 2016. Individual members of the Board have a lead role in the delivery of the Stirling's Community Justice Outcomes Improvement Plan (CJOIP).

- 5.2 The CJOIP, known as the Reducing Offending Strategy 2018-2021, is aligned to national outcomes and performance indicators and has identified four priority areas for action locally. Identified in collaboration with stakeholders and supported by a needs assessment these are Employability, Healthcare, Housing and Partnership Planning/Commissioning.
- 5.3 Work is underway to ensure the evidence base is up-to-date and responsive to current need and priorities. This work is focused on three key outputs: peer led research supported by those with experience of the justice system, local data analysis and work force consultation

Impact of Covid

Services contributing to community justice outcomes continue to experience challenges with regard to service delivery in line with restrictions arising from Covid 19 but are adapting service delivery arrangements as required in line with individual service recovery plans.

5.4 Gender Based Violence

The Action for Change Partnership co-ordinates Council activities relating to gender based violence. This work is supported by the Council's Gender Based Violence Co-ordinator and undertaken in the context of Equally Safe – the joint Scottish Government and COSLA strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls in Scotland. Work undertaken by the partnership and its member organisations includes:-

- Direct support for victims of domestic abuse.
 - Support for organisations delivering services to victims of gender based violence including sexual violence.
 - Prevention work in schools on promoting gender equality as a means of changing attitudes towards violence against women.
 - Gender based violence issue based training for Council employees and local partnership organisations.
 - Contributing to development of national policy.
 - Raising awareness within the community of individuals' rights and support available.
- 5.5 Stirling Gender Based Violence Partnership (SGBVP) produced its first Gender Based Violence Strategy and Action Plan which was approved by the SGBVP on the 30 July 2020. SGBVP will monitor the performance indicators and milestones within the Action Plan. This will form the local performance reporting system which will align to the national Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework.
- 5.6 Locally delivered programmes supporting survivors and perpetrators of domestic abuse include:
- Forth Valley Multi Agency Tasking And Co-ordinating group (MATAC): this brings together partners to discuss and assess the risk of prolific domestic abuse perpetrators.
 - Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC): meets monthly to assess prioritised cases of high risk- operates on a Forth valley wide basis.

- The Caledonian Programme - an integrated approach to addressing domestic abuse by men by working with convicted men to reduce their re-offending, while offering integrated services to support and address the safety of women and children.

5.7 Stirling acquired White Ribbon City status in 2010. The White Ribbon campaign works alongside Action for Change, developing training for men and delivering seminars in local schools promoting gender equality as a means of changing attitudes towards violence against women. A signing of the White Ribbon pledge by key councillors and management took place at the 16 days conference in Stirling in November 2019.

Impact of Covid

Stirling Gender Based Violence Partnership has undertaken a comprehensive Covid-19 risk assessment against the national Covid Supplementary National Violence against Women Guidance, which includes mitigating actions to address the risks identified. The Partnership's Action Plan will be reviewed on a quarterly basis using the above risk assessment. Partners delivering services have adapted their delivery methods, using a blended approach of online and telephone support and limited face to face support.

5.8 Hate Crime

The Council is a long standing member of the Multi Agency Hate Response Strategy Partnership (MAHRS). This multi-agency Forth Valley wide partnership monitors and tackles incidents against individuals or communities motivated by prejudice in relation to racial identity, religion, disability, sexual orientation or transgender identity. The future role of this group needs to be considered following approval of the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill in March 2021.

Impact of Covid

Individuals and communities have continued to be able to report hate crime throughout the pandemic and there is little evidence that the number of incidences have increased in the Council area Council to date.

5.9 Public Transport

The Public Transport Co-ordination Team procures, monitors and manages transport services provided by the Council. These include school transport contracts for mainstream school pupils and pupils with additional support needs, as well as transport on behalf of Social Services for vulnerable adults and children. Most contracted vehicles are fully accessible.

5.10 The Team administers the Blue Badge scheme for our residents, providing on-street parking concessions for severely disabled people experiencing the greatest barriers to their mobility. The scheme allows badge holders to park without charge or time limit in Council owned car parks, in otherwise restricted on-street parking environments and on yellow lines unless a loading ban is in place. National Entitlement Cards are also administered by the Team on behalf of our elderly and disabled residents. Cardholders are permitted to travel free on all local bus services and express bus services throughout Scotland. Blind and partially sighted cardholders also permitted free travel on rail services within Scotland.

5.11 Additional support for disabled residents is provided through funding for:-

- Shopmobility: membership is available to anyone with a temporary or permanent physical impairment that presents difficulties in getting around the shops and provides the loan of scooters, powered chairs and manual wheelchairs

- Dial-a-Journey: provides affordable and accessible door-to-door transport for people who have mobility difficulties and cannot use conventional public transport.
- Taxicard: membership is available to anyone unable to use conventional bus services and provides subsidised taxi journeys.

5.12 Stirling Bus Station is staffed at all times and provides a safe waiting environment for vulnerable people, especially in the evenings. The internal layout and design of the bus station, including the use of dementia-friendly colours and signage, ensures it supports accessibility for all to the services provided. A new ground floor consulting room has been created to allow staff to have confidential conversations with customers, including the elderly or those with mobility difficulties.

Impact of Covid

Blue Badges due to expire after January 2020 were extended until 30 September 2020. During lockdown new applications were accepted and administered but due to the extension of the expiry dates of existing badges application numbers were low. The subsequent increased number of applications received in August and September 2020 were all processed within 28 days.

The production of National Entitlement Cards was suspended between March and July 2020, with cards which had expired during this time extended. Consequently no new applications were received or renewals administered during this time and applications received since July have been duly processed.

In the lead up to lockdown, there was a significant reduction in the use of Shopmobility. The service was suspended between 23 March and 3 August 2020 but resumed with a full service on 3 August. Dial-a-Journey experienced a significant reduction in patronage in the lead up to lockdown and when lockdown was imposed between 23rd March and 3rd August, the service was not suspended but experienced a total collapse in normal uptake as most passengers were either in the extremely vulnerable category, were shielding, or all activities they attended had ceased. During lockdown transport continued to be provided for those with essential needs such as shopping or medical treatment or appointments. Despite minimal requests for the Taxicard service passengers were still able to book journeys throughout lockdown.

6.0 SCHOOLS LEARNING & EDUCATION

6.1 Our Vision

The vision of Schools, Learning and Education in Stirling is one of high achievement and high attainment, through excellent learning experiences and ambition for all. Our vision will be realised through continued focus and commitment to the principles that underpin Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), Curriculum for Excellence and Developing the Young Workforce. We want to achieve the highest standards and deliver first-class services so that we are improving life through learning for all Stirling's children and young people and their families. We need to deliver excellence in terms of ensuring children and young people acquire a broad range of skills and capacities at the highest levels, whilst also delivering equity so that every child and young person thrives and has the best opportunity to achieve success regardless of their social circumstances or additional needs.

- 6.2 Across our services we have a wide range of approaches to ensure the needs of all our learners are met. Seven secondary schools, 40 primary schools, two special schools and five specialist provisions are further enhanced with outreach support providing expertise in Autistic Spectrum Disorder and additional support needs. Special schools provide education provision for pupils with severe and complex needs and social, emotional and behaviour needs. All educational establishments continue to implement a coherent, flexible and enriched curriculum which challenges schools and communities to develop children and young people to become responsible citizens showing respect for others, understanding different beliefs and cultures, and developing informed, ethical views of complex issues.

6.3 Inclusion for All

Inclusive practice in the education system is linked to a range of legislative duties related to Children and Young People Act, Additional Support for Learning Act, Equality Act, GIRFEC policy and child protection and safeguarding responsibilities. 'Getting It Right For Every Child' (GIRFEC) reflects the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and requires a focus on protecting and promoting children's wellbeing and ensuring they are listened to and included in decisions that affect them. The curriculum in schools and nurseries ensures a learning environment in which children and young people feel safe, secure, included and respected with learning experiences planned to explore diversity and challenge racism and religious intolerance.

6.4 Specific Equality Programmes

Promoting social inclusion and celebrating diversity are key aspects of the health and wellbeing responsibility of all educators. In developing the thinking and learning of our children and young people to contribute positively to local and global communities, gendered violence reduction programmes such as Mentors in Violence Prevention and No Knives, Better Lives have been launched in our secondary schools. These complement well-established initiatives promoting recognition and understanding of the diversity of our communities and reducing social exclusion such as Show Racism the Red Card and Roots of Empathy.

- 6.5 Partnership working with Social Work, Health and Stirling Carers' Centre colleagues has ensured that children and young people with caring responsibilities have appropriate support in place as set out in The Carer's Act (2016). From a Young Carer's perspective, the Act aims to enable a young person to experience childhood in a comparable way to their non-caring peers. In schools, our Young Carers have access to Young Carer groups where they have ongoing support from a school-based coordinator and education officer from Stirling Carers' Centre. At times when a young person requires greater support as a result of their caring role, Stirling Carers' Centre will work with the young person and their family directly.

6.6 Ongoing activity has included the following:-

- Collaborative working between Children and Families, Youth Participation Team, Schools and partner agencies supports an equitable Duke of Edinburgh scheme offer and we strive to remove barriers and support any young person who wishes to participate in this. Under this approach a wide range of young people participated in Duke of Edinburgh including those at risk of a negative post school destination, young people who attend a specialist setting supporting social and emotional needs, young people attending a specialist setting for severe and complex needs and home educated young people.
- The 'Ready for Work' programme" launched in August 2018, delivers a bespoke learning experience to young people equipping them with the skills needed to transition successfully to employment or further education. This offers an alternative educational experience to those young beginning to disengage in S4 of their school career and at greatest risk of not securing a positive destination on leaving school. Instead of attending school, identified young people receive high levels of support to participate in a range of relevant learning experiences enabling them to achieve a variety of awards and employability qualifications. Barriers to successful post school transitions are removed and participants develop high levels of confidence and resilience. The programme continues to evolve and adapt to meet the specific needs of our young people.
- Work has begun to raise awareness of the benefits to employers, learners and wider school communities, of providing work experience opportunities for young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN). Working in collaboration, the ASN and Wellbeing, Skills and Youth Employment Team, Learning and Employability Services and external partners increase the choice of vocational learning opportunities for young people who face significant barriers in their learning.
- Education and health colleagues collaborated to develop Forth Valley guidance to help schools support transgender young people which was positively received by many establishments. National guidance has now been published by LGBT Youth Scotland providing current information, research and advice in ensuring transgender young people have a positive school experience
- In session 2017/2018, cross-sector colleagues collaborated to refresh anti-bullying, positive behaviour and exclusions guidance. The refreshed guidelines "Respect for All: Preventing and Challenging Bullying Behaviours" have been implemented and schools and nurseries are updating their own guidance. All now record bullying incidents in line with this guidance and use this data to inform practice and improvement activity in school.
- GIRFEC documentation remains the main framework agreed across all services and across Forth Valley for assessment and planning purposes in respect of individual children's needs. Schools can however also use the GIRFEC Wellbeing App, designed to provide information around Additional Support Needs (ASN) including bullying, in planning for individual children.
- Secondary schools were invited to support the global '16 Days of Action' campaign to eradicate gendered violence by using their social media presence to inform their followers of the campaign; highlight key information about gendered violence and provide information about services providing support. As a pilot, schools were asked to use their Twitter feeds daily during the '16 Days' (25th November 2018 – 10th December 2018) to tweet a range of messages created by the ASN & Wellbeing Team anchored by the hashtag: #stirlingyouthagainstviolence. Three secondary schools took up the invitation, with messages successfully retweeted by a wide range of followers.
- In December 2019, a Young People's Conference was held as part of the '16 Days of Action'. This was open specifically to young people with additional support needs with the aim of exploring the idea of consent and healthy relationships through the key message: "Is this okay?" The conference was held in partnership with Education Scotland's Mentors In Violence Programme and was attended by young people from schools in Stirling, Clackmannanshire and Falkirk Council areas.

6.7 Tackling Prejudice

All schools must use the equalities and bullying module on SEEMIS to record any bullying incidents and for a prejudice based incident schools are asked to submit a Health and Safety incident form. Practitioner knowledge and understanding around Hate Incidents and Hate Crimes has been enhanced through partnership working with Central Scotland Regional Equality Council. Schools in Stirling actively promote respecting and valuing diversity, with this often led by leadership teams of young people. This work is supported by Respect for All guidance, Mentors in Violence Prevention Groups, LGBT groups and promoted proudly on Twitter where the values are shared.

6.8 School Based Youth Learning

School based youth learning supports youth participation and youth voice, enabling young people to be involved in a variety of decision making processes within local and national forum such as Stirling Youth Forum and the Scottish Youth Parliament. School based youth learning supports conversations around varied subjects including diversity, discrimination, harassment, bullying, poverty and relationships.

- 6.9 The Stirling Young Scot Portal is maintained and updated by local young people, for local young people. The portal offers local and national information on a variety of subjects including employment and training, travel, relationships etc.

6.10 Youth

The Youth Team has developed a varied programme of community based youth work provision in response to local need. The programme offers a range of learning and development opportunities to young people aged 10-25 years through both targeted and universal provision. The team currently offers over 25 opportunities per week for approximately 40 weeks per year. These opportunities include youth groups, detached and outreach work, thematic work, holiday programmes and peer education.

- 6.11 The Team links with national youth work partners including Youthlink Scotland, Youth Scotland and LGBT Youth Scotland and offered a significant programme of opportunities to young people as part of the Year of Young People 2018 which included:
- Three young people from the Youth Team Young Leaders group participated in an I-LEAD Achievement Generators Leadership Residential event (ILEAD offers practical leadership development opportunities for young people tailored to their needs. (Achievement Generators is a Youth Scotland project designed to tackle under achievement and help close the attainment gap)
 - Four young people from the Triangle Group attended the National LGBT Youth Gathering in Dumfries and Galloway
 - 12 young people from Cowie, Bannockburn, Hillpark and Triangle groups visited Glasgow Women's Library for workshops on LGBT and Women's History
 - 10 young people from Bannockburn, Hillpark and Cowie took part in the Young Wummin Project celebrating the role of women in WW1
 - Five young people from the Triangle Group took part in Tennis Lessons at Stirling University, funded by the NHS

6.12 Addressing the Poverty Related Attainment Gap

Work undertaken to address the gap in education progress between children and young people living in our most deprived communities and those in our least deprived communities has included Scottish Attainment Challenge work. This has been undertaken through national Pupil Equity Fund and Schools Programmes, local Cost of the School Day initiatives and support for children and families experiencing food insecurity.

- 6.13 In Stirling, Raploch Primary School and Wallace High School have continued to receive additional funding through the Scottish Attainment Challenge Schools Programme. This funding focuses on achieving equity in educational outcomes, with a particular emphasis on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Both schools have implemented a range of interventions focusing on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing and have shared the impact of these with schools locally and nationally.
- 6.14 Additional Pupil Equity Funding through the Scottish Attainment Challenge was allocated directly to all but two schools in Stirling based on numbers of children registered for free school meals. Following analysis of identified gaps and barriers to learning in their communities, schools planned a range of interventions aimed at closing the poverty-related attainment gap. This has included appointment of Family Link Workers to increase parental engagement and promote improved attendance, additional literacy and numeracy supports and provision of a range of wider curricular opportunities and initiatives to improve health and wellbeing.
- 6.15 Food insecurity was identified as a concern for many families, with holiday periods particularly challenging. Consequently, the Council provided funding to carry out pilot programmes to identify the most effective response to this issue locally. The resulting Holiday Fun Club initiative was initially trialled in 2017 and has since then been developed and delivered in varied formats. This is delivered in conjunction with Third Sector partner organisations and these continue to be invited to join the framework for future provision. This initiative has been supported by awareness raising, ensuring schools are proactive in promoting this opportunity to families in need and provided approximately 950 meals across seven venues in summer 2018 and 700 meals over the two week Easter holiday period in 2019. Holiday Fun Clubs were also delivered during the February school holiday (2020), but postponed during spring school holidays.
- 6.16 Pilot programmes providing free access to sanitary provision trialled in Stirling were highlighted nationally as best practice and led to a universally adopted approach on this. Free sanitary provision is now available in all schools, in line with government principles of promoting dignity, choice and reducing stigma. Youth services have allocated a worker to each learning community to take forward plans in each school and teams in secondary schools link remotely sharing ideas and solutions around providing products in their schools
- 6.17 The Council recognises that low income can affect children's participation and experiences at school: missing out and feeling different can make it more difficult for children and young people from low-income households to learn, achieve and to be happy at school. Guidance has been provided to all schools on addressing "Cost of the School Day" for families and consideration of such issues is now embedded in practice in schools. Equity of opportunity maintains a high-profile in school policy, planning and daily practice with supporting practice including :-
- Three pilot schools exploring increasing family engagement through food in partnership with Children in Scotland through clubs after school where families cook and eat together.
 - A remote learning session focusing on equity, including Cost of the School Day delivered to newly qualified teachers.
- An Excellence and Equity Strategy for Stirling schools has also been formulated highlighting effective practice, setting out key priorities and providing tools to support schools address the poverty related attainment gap.
- 6.18 The need for children to develop financial literacy is recognised as an essential life skill and work to promote this in schools has included a presentation by an education officer at a Stirling Credit Union conference to support parental volunteers take forward savings schemes in schools and three primary schools now have self-supported Junior Savers clubs

Impact of Covid

The Service responded promptly to the pandemic with an increased focus on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people and a range of supports were made available for children, young people and their families as follows:

- *Local hubs for children of essential key workers were established within a week of lockdown.*
- *online advice providing information and signposting for parents/carers, staff and young people, ranging from home learning to supporting mental health and wellbeing,*
- *a telephone advice line for parents/carers and a wellbeing advice line for young people,*
- *'Stay at Home Kits' delivered to young people engaged with the Youth Participation Service.,*
- *Virtual Team around the Child meetings took place ensuring that planning for a child or young person continued during lockdown and whilst schools were closed,*
- *Pupil equity funds and resources were used to support children and families who needed it.*

A virtual wellbeing team enhanced support for more vulnerable children and young people based on a tiered level of support such as the provision of free school meals or access to a nurturing space outside the home to support the wellbeing of children and their parents/carers.

The Local Education Phasing Delivery Plan outlined the authority's approach to supporting pupils and staff to safely return to schools and nurseries with a key focus on wellbeing, connectedness and sense of belonging, supported by nurturing approaches at whole school and nursery level. Support Services activities evolved to meet individual school and learner's needs with resources produced for staff including information and guidance on responding to critical incidents, an e-module on recovery and nurture principles, and a Nurturing Wellbeing Framework for schools and nurseries. There has also been further development of online resources for parents/carers and young people. Stirling's Equity Toolkit has been updated to reflect the impact of Covid-19 and shared with schools to support effective, evidence-based intervention. All of these approaches have built on and further developed existing ways of working and their focus on mental health and wellbeing, nurture and relationships will continue.

Significant focus on and investment in digital resources and approaches has transformed the capacity of the Service to support learning for all. Greater opportunities for innovative and individualised approaches to learning have been developed and work on this this will continue.

Particular challenges arose in respect of child protection and safeguarding services while schools were closed, with alternative approaches providing reassurance. An early increase in child protection referrals when schools re-opened quickly levelled off, but remains an area for continued close attention. Various planned activities involving young people, e.g. Duke of Edinburgh expeditions, Young Ambassadors for Inclusion and Holiday Fun Clubs were cancelled, delayed or replaced with alternatives but have been now reinstated or beginning to be able to re-emerge.

School closures and reduced social contact inevitably had a significant impact due to the extensive disruption to service delivery which required development of alternative approaches. These have however also led to increased cross sector working, innovation and increased focus on wellbeing and need and these priorities will remain central to the work of the service. With schools reopened open the increased need for risk assessment/s and responding to cases of Covid within the nursery and school community brought additional work challenges for all school and nursery leaders. This in turn has led to a sharper focus on prioritising areas of work that have the greatest impact for children and their families.

7.0 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- 7.1 Children and Families provide a range of services for children and young people and by the very nature of the services it provides, plays a key role in ensuring that the principles and objectives of the Equality Act 2010 are embedded in practice. The focus of services is to ensure that children and young people get the best start in life, are supported to address disadvantage in whatever form it presents and are afforded equality of opportunity to help maximize their broader life chances.
- 7.2 GIRFEC;” Getting It Right for Every Child” is the national approach to improving outcomes and supporting the wellbeing of our children and young people by offering the right help at the right time from the right people. It supports them and their parent/s or carer/s to work in partnership with the services that can best help them. GIRFEC aims to improve the wellbeing and lives of children and young people by better addressing inequality and disadvantage. It does this by:-
- Setting out how people working with children, young people and parents should understand and consider a child’s or young person’s wellbeing.
 - Ensuring each child or young person has a named person available as a central point of contact for them and their parents/carers, to provide advice, information and support, and help to access other services if needed
 - Establishing a single planning framework – called the Child’s Plan – to ensure a consistent approach across all services, to the planning, delivery and coordination around an individual child’s needs and circumstances
 - Protected characteristics are inherent considerations in the service planning for children, young people and their families and wherever possible efforts are focused on mitigating disadvantage and addressing any dynamics of inequality.
- 7.3 Stirling Council services, along with universal service providers and others, are considered to be well ahead with the GIRFEC agenda locally and the joint working practices and relationships that support its operation. Performance management systems have been developed to support better identification of community need/s and inform service design as the service and partners move towards a Place Based approach to delivering services.
- 7.4 It is anticipated that the Place Based approach will build and improve our understanding of socio economic disadvantage through pooling information from across all areas of service provision, help better inform strategic decision making, advance equality of opportunity and foster improved community relations. Feedback is also gathered from people using our services to ensure that where possible, service provision is more effective in meeting and addressing individual’s needs, reducing inequality of opportunity and disadvantage and removing discrimination. The end goal of this strategic approach is that we work “hand in hand” with the people who make up a local community to co design, develop and produce services that are better attuned to local need and which help mitigate and reduce risks. This requires close cooperation and collaboration at all levels across services and with the community itself and is a whole system approach.
- 7.5 The Council is committed to closing the attainment gaps among young people; particularly for those who have additional support needs (ASN). A staged intervention planning process is used across our schools to assess and identify need, plan and evaluate appropriate supports in partnership with children or young people and their families / carers and other services and agencies as required. Guidance on involving young people in planning and delivering their support has been launched promoting the use of supportive communication approaches and tools; sharing good practice ideas and promoting young people’s full participation. These approaches are supported by a programme of learning and development opportunities for staff covering a wide range of ASN challenges and support approaches.

- 7.6 The Children and Families teams also work in close partnerships with a range of third sector organisations to provide a variety of supports for children/ young people and their families/ carers. Effective partnership working similarly occurs with NHS Forth Valley, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and Police Scotland to ensure better outcomes for children and young people.
- 7.7 The council in its Corporate Parenting role promotes the welfare of all looked after children/ young people and care leavers to ensure they are not disadvantaged and can experience the best possible outcomes. The move to early intervention and prevention for children, people, families and carers is supported by recent legislation and policies, including the Children and Young People's Act 2014. Collectively this seeks to ensure that children and young people's wellbeing is supported at all life stages and transitions and underpin our approach to how shaping and delivering our services.
- 7.8 There is an ongoing commitment to ensuring that vulnerable children and young people are consulted with on a regular basis and have the opportunity to influence policy and the planning and delivery of services they receive. All Children and Families work sits within and is framed by the rights agenda for children, young people and their families and close attention is paid to building in developments in this arena. Most recently, the Independent Care Review has delivered on " The Promise" a ten year plan that seeks whole system change and improvement and new Secure Care Standards have also been introduced The Service has taken action on both these areas identified and is setting strategic planning to embrace and accommodate the recommendations made .
- 7.9 Work around equality in all Children and Families services has, with national backing and direction, taken significant steps to improve the situations and circumstances that may or do disadvantage children or young people . Planning to achieve change is ambitious and the time frames concerned reflect this with change sought not simply in structures, systems and processes but more significantly in the cultures and mind sets that may contribute to experiences of inequality.
- 7.10 Support for our looked after children promotes a relationship based approach through the use of functional family therapy, Includem , mentoring supports, personalised planning; therapist support for children in foster care, and a social pedagogy approach in Brucefield Children's Home. Individually and collectively; these aim to support early prevention of mental health problems and strengthen young people's ability and resilience to cope with possible emerging adversities in adulthood. Comprehensive accommodation provision for care leavers that encompasses relationship based support has also been developed. The Children's Disability team also provides specific support and assistance to children and families requiring specialised services.
- 7.11 A range of developments are in place to support all children and young people with their mental health. Nurture approaches, growth mindset and staff development on mindfulness, attachment and supporting children who have experienced loss are available for all. A range of approaches are also used to provide more specific support such as Friends for Life groups, Seasons for Growth and exam anxiety workshops with more targeted support also available from our specialist Outreach Teams and Educational Psychologists.

7.12 Criminal Justice

The Caledonian system developed for the Scottish Accreditation Panel for Offender Programmes and the Equality Unit of the Scottish Government has been adopted by the service to address domestic abuse and improve the lives of women, children and men. A number of our communities experience the impact that misuse of alcohol and drugs can have on individuals and families, and we work closely with the Alcohol and Drugs Partnership to support individuals on a rehabilitation and recovery route. A drug treatment

group has been established and its members have developed their own committee supported by the Criminal Justice Service and the Alcohol and Drug Treatment Partnership.

7.12 Criminal Justice Services have also undertaken to develop specific responses in relation to women who are involved in offending behavior, to support them in the community and help them to cease further offending. Changes in legislation and national policy have further improved opportunities for work with young people to help prevent escalation of community behaviours towards the adult justice system.

7.13 The Place Based Approach being adopted in the Stirling Council area is based on the strengths of established approaches and practice, supporting communities to support themselves, with a focus on early interventions and greater access to universal provision when required. This approach will assist the more vulnerable people in our communities, often those who have been the victims of crime themselves; to access services at an earlier stage and will also assist the Council to focus resources on those in greatest need.

Impact of Covid

Children & Families and Justice Social Work Services are statutory service providers and were recognised Key Worker groups during the pandemic. Consequently while the character of service provision changed, statutory activities to address needs and mitigate risk within and across the community continued. Social Work Service staff maintained home visits, virtual contact and continued to provide comprehensive service support for children and families and justice provision.

During the initial phase of lockdown there was a significant impact for children with disabilities and their families as care services were less able to provide in home support and respite and schools were closed. The numbers of children with additional support needs and disabilities have increased in recent years and this is a priority area for development in the Children's Services Plan to ensure sufficient specialist educational placements and care supports are available and that transitions happen smoothly for this group of young people.

8.0 INFRASTRUCTURE and REGULATORY SERVICES

8.1 Licensing

Licensing determines applications and provides advice for a variety of services including taxi drivers, taxi vehicles, private hire drivers, street traders, alcohol licensing and gambling (both of which are dealt with by the Licensing Board). Licence applications are published in weekly schedules available to interested parties, including Stirling Area Access Panel, and included in a Public Access Register on the Council's web site. Meetings with applicants regarding licence applications or existing licences can be arranged at a venue to suit the customer and the Licensing Team can be contacted by a variety of methods – by telephone, email and in writing, with applications also available on line.

- 8.2 Licensing will be reviewing the provision of wheelchair accessible taxi vehicles to ensure sufficient provision in the fleet. Officers will also investigate the introduction of a new tactile certificate to indicate to potential passengers with visual impairment when taxi drivers have a genuine medical exemption that prevents them from carrying assistance dogs in their vehicle. Training for licence holders in assisting persons with disabilities will also be considered as part of a general review of the requirement for driver training.

Impact of Covid

In response to COVID-19, Licensing had to rapidly change from a largely paper based application system to working remotely and primarily electronically. There has been a significant reduction in the service's ability to provide face-to-face advice as offices have been closed to the public since March 2020, and the Licensing Standards Officer only able to undertake limited site visits with priority on assuring compliance with public health restrictions. The proposed review of the provision of wheelchair accessible taxi vehicles and driver training have also been delayed due to the pandemic. Changes in how the service is delivered and restrictions on this are expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

8.3 Planning & Building Standards

Building Standards Service is the main regulatory service that ensures the Council's responsibilities regarding built development and equalities considerations are integrated into decisions, particularly around physical access and public safety. Planning seeks to encourage applicants to consider equalities considerations at pre application stage. Meetings with applicants/agents regarding planning or building warrant applications can be arranged at a venue to suit the customer.

- 8.4 Planning and building warrant applications are published in weekly schedules available to interested parties, including Stirling Area Access Panel, and included in a Public Access Register on the Council's web site. The Access Panel has the opportunity to consider all applications and is supported to do this through a grant funding agreement and named contacts in the Council. Planning and Building Standards also refer projects involving significant public access considerations to the Access Panel.
- 8.5 New or revised planning policies are the subject of comprehensive public and community consultation including with local equality groups and where appropriate are also the subject of Equality Impact Assessment. Local Development Plans as the key planning framework for the area; have been the subject of extensive consultation and impact assessment during their preparation. Planning policies which involve access considerations are routinely informed by consultation with the Stirling Area Access Panel.

Impact of Covid

All services provided by Planning and Building Standards have continued with some adaption in their delivery. Members of the Service have worked from home but can be contacted by telephone, email or MS Teams. Duty cover has continued to respond to general enquiries, site visits have been restricted to those which have been risk assessed in terms of safety for the personnel involved and regular communication with the Stirling Area Access Panel has been maintained. The service is not aware of any issues that the above arrangements have presented regarding its duties under the Equalities Act.

Restrictions on the ability to hold public meetings has limited pre - application engagement activity by prospective applicants. Whilst Scottish Government has provided guidance on how to engage with the public and meet Covid restrictions, the increased use of virtual means of engagement has potentially excluded members of the public without access to digital communication or without digital skills. In such circumstances the Planning Service has encouraged the applicant to work more closely with Community Councils.

8.6 Regulatory Services

Regulatory Services provide the following statutory functions:

- Environmental Health (Food Health & Safety and Public Health)
- Trading Standards and Consumer Advice
- Animal Health and Welfare
- Bandeath Stray Dog Shelter
- Animal Control (Dogs and Pests)
- Community Safety (ASB, Parking Enforcement, CCTV and Environmental Crime)

8.7 Equalities considerations are integral to the delivery of all of the above services, particularly regarding public safety and physical access to services. All employees are encouraged to embrace cultural diversity and have been briefed or trained in Diversity Awareness with training ongoing. New or revised policies are routinely the subject of extensive consultation and Equality Impact Assessments.

8.8 The service ensures constructive engagement with all our communities through the production of publications in a range of languages. Language support is available for anyone requiring it, including the provision of a translator in person or over the telephone. This support is offered free of charge and officers routinely advise clients of its availability. Additional provision has included facilitating training courses such as food hygiene, in alternative languages.

8.9 As part of its Prevention, Detection and Early Intervention Strategy Regulatory Services carries out the following initiatives:

- Monthly Tasking and Coordinating Meetings with Police Scotland and relevant stakeholders to ensure a proactive approach to tackling antisocial behaviour.
- Regular meetings with Police Scotland and other relevant stakeholders to ensure a coordinated approach to parking enforcement.
- True call - a call blocker device aimed at eliminating nuisance callers to vulnerable persons
- Nominated Neighbour - aimed at promoting an area wide culture of support and inclusion
- Think Jessica campaign raising awareness of the long term isolating impact of scam mail.
- Buy with Confidence - a National Trade Approval Scheme to reduce health inequalities, promote health and wellbeing and protect vulnerable adults from financial harm.
- Working with Social Care Partnerships to tackling doorstep crime.

Impact of Covid

The Regulatory Service was given delegated powers to enforce Coronavirus Regulations brought into force in March 2020, creating an entirely new field of work for the service. Since March 2020 the Service has received 710 additional complaints and enquiries regarding compliance with these measures. In response to the pandemic, the Service has also attended numerous Incident Management Team meetings following identification of positive cases, attended Problem Assessment Groups to discuss possible future issues such as gatherings and events, and undertaken joint visits with Police Scotland to raise awareness of issues in specific communities. One of the most valuable outcomes arising from COVID-19 has been the establishment of an Expert Working Group comprised of Environmental Health and Trading Standards professional. This group provides advice and guidance to ensure a consistent interpretation of the COVID-19 regulations enacted over the period.

The Service reviewed Parking Enforcement arrangements following significant issues caused by inconsiderate parking due to unprecedented numbers of visitors to beauty spots in the Council area. Reduced opportunity for holiday travel and the rise of 'staycations' is expected to continue to result in increased visitor numbers with associated potential for parking infringement and public safety issues. Shift patterns were already being reviewed prior to the pandemic, the need to respond to parking and environmental crime issues emerging during the pandemic have resulted in the Service seeking to move to seven day working.

Whilst COVID-19 work has been given priority, the service has also continued to triage and prioritise statutory work such as:

- *Product Safety Investigations*
- *Statutory Nuisance Abatement work*
- *Investigating Food Poisoning reports*
- *Monitoring Local Air Quality*
- *Antisocial Behaviour Investigation*

The continued monitoring and regulation of existing statutory functions has been undertaken against a background of Avian Influenza and the end of the UK/EU transition period. Increased controls over Avian Influenza required the Animal Health and Welfare Team to ensure all farmed birds were kept housed and the end of the transition period following the UK's exit from the European Market saw changes to exportation rules resulting in increasing demand for advice and guidance on this. The service has also received an increase in reports of antisocial behaviour, potentially due to more people staying and working at home.

The impact of Covid on the Regulatory Service has therefore been very significant.

8.10 Revenue & Benefits

The Services provided by the Revenue & Benefits Team cover:

- Housing Benefit.
- Council Tax Administration.
- Council Tax Reduction.
- Scottish Welfare Fund.
- Discretionary Housing Payments.
- School Clothing Grants.
- Free School Meals.
- Educational Maintenance Allowance.

8.11 In delivering these activities, the Team seeks to ensure that where possible, all customers are identified from the one initial contact. The needs of customers who require additional support are met through the use of accessible application forms and award letters, named advisers

where required, a visiting service for the housebound and elderly, and face to face interviews with specialist advisers. Employees have also received training in the use of plain English, supporting the needs of people with learning difficulties and using sign language.

8.12 The Revenue & Benefits Team supports the following customers:- 42000 Council Tax payers, 330 Housing Benefit claimants, 5600 Council Tax Reduction claimants, 1250 people receiving Discretionary Housing Payment, 1250 parents/carers receiving Footwear and Clothing Grants and 2950 people receiving support from the Scottish Welfare Fund.

8.13 The Revenue and Benefits Team along with the Scottish Welfare Fund team works with all relevant Council services and external agencies to provide appropriate advice, to try to recognise and identify customers with multiple debt and to assist customers maximise their take up of benefits, including advice on the Discretionary Housing Payment Fund, Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants.

Impact of Covid

Since the introduction of lockdown, the Revenue & Benefits Team have administered financial support totalling £23.8 million to 2089 businesses. This has been undertaken using an accessible application form, a direct telephone number and a dedicated e-mail address for the submission of applications. It is anticipated this service will continue as part the response to the impact of the pandemic on the economy, subject to local restrictions and eligibility for financial support.

Revenue & Benefits also administered the Self Isolation Grant introduced on 12 October 2020, supporting people to self-isolate who might otherwise would not have done due to financial reasons. The £500 payment is awarded to those who meet the eligibility criteria and scheme is due to run until 31st January 2021. This process has also been supported by an accessible application form, a direct telephone number and a dedicated e-mail address for the submission of applications.

8.14 Transport, Parking & Roads

The services provided cover:-

- Park and Ride
- Public off street car parks and on street parking
- Improving and maintaining public roads and footways

Equality considerations particularly regarding accessibility, are fundamental to the work and responsibilities of all these services. The Park & Ride service offers staffed, safe waiting environments for vulnerable people and the buses used are fully accessible.

8.15 Improvement schemes for public roads and footways are designed using best practice regarding access for people with mobility difficulties. Stirling Area Access Panel is consulted on proposed schemes and access audits are undertaken in conjunction with the Panel. Several communities are, with the aid of the national charity Living Streets, undertaking access audits. When these are submitted to the Council, they can inform improvement works to address access issues in the street environment. Dropped kerbs are improved as part of an annual programme and additional requests for these are met as far as possible. Pedestrian crossings are upgraded to meet best practice in provision for people with mobility difficulties and when undertaking road works and pedestrian diversions for people with mobility difficulties are provided when requested.

Impact of Covid

Delivery of Roads improvements schemes were halted temporarily due to the pandemic but were resumed following Scottish Government guidance that essential works could restart in April 2020.

9.0 CONCLUSION

This report confirms how the Council continues to mainstream equality across its wide ranging activities and functions, demonstrating its continued commitment to pursuing and delivering equality for its citizens, communities and employees. It also demonstrates how the Council's efforts have become increasingly focused on tackling socio economic inequality and disadvantage experienced by our most vulnerable citizens.

It also contains information on the impact of the pandemic on the Council's activities and confirms the extensive work undertaken by the authority in adapting its operations and service delivery arrangements ensuring that as far as possible these have been maintained and in some instances potentially improved.

In conclusion, this report confirms that the Council continues to meet its statutory obligations under the 2010 Equality Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty and is fully committed to continuing to do so.