

Derry City and Strabane District Council

Open Minutes of the Meeting of the Health and Community Committee of Derry City and Strabane District Council held Remotely on Thursday 12 November 2020 at 4.00pm.

Present: - Councillor R Barr (Chair); Aldermen Devenney, Hussey and Warke; Councillors Burke, Duffy, Edwards, Farrell, Ferguson, Harkin, Logue, McHugh, Mooney and Reilly.

Non-members of Committee:- Aldermen Guy, Kerrigan and McClintock; Councillors Carr, Donnelly, Doyle, Durkan, Gallagher and Kelly.

In Attendance: - Director of Health and Community (Mrs K McFarland), Head of Community Development and Leisure (Mr B O'Hagan), Head of Health and Community Wellbeing (Mr S Donaghy), PA to Health and Community Director (Mrs L Shields) and Committee Services Assistant (Mrs T Johnstone).

HC188/20 Notice and Summons for Meeting

The Director of Health and Community read the Notice and Summons for the Meeting.

HC189/20 Members Attendance and Apologies

The Director of Health and Community recorded Members attendance. No apologies were received.

HC190/20 Statement for Remote Meetings

The Chair read the statement for remote meetings.

HC192/20 Declarations of Members' Interests

Councillor Burke declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following agenda items:

- Agenda Item 9 – Covid-19 Access to Food Programme
- Agenda Item 10 – Covid-19 Financial Inclusion Partnership Fund
- Agenda Item 13 – Covid-19 Community Recovery Plans.

Councillor Duffy declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following agenda item;

- Agenda Item 10 – Covid-19 Financial Inclusion Partnership Fund

Councillor Ferguson declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following agenda items;

- Agenda Item 13 – Covid-19 Community Recovery Plans
- Agenda Item 11 – Electromagnetic Fields from 5G Base Stations
- Agenda Item 14 – EU Exit and NI Protocol: Imported Food Checks at Points of Entry/Ports.

Alderman Devenney declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following agenda item;

- Agenda Item 10 – Covid-19 Financial Inclusion Partnership Fund.

Councillor Logue declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following agenda item;

- Agenda Item 10 – Covid-19 Financial Inclusion Partnership Fund.

Open for Decision

HC193/20 Deputation: Attendance by Dr Paul Molloy and Dr Ciaran Mullan to respond to Members' queries on the provision of GP Services.

The Chair thanked both Doctors for giving up their valuable time to address the Committee.

Dr Molloy thanked the Committee for the invitation address Members. He outlined that he was currently a GP with Clarendon Medical Practice in the city as well as working shifts at the Covid Centre in Altnagelvin Hospital. He noted that Clarendon Medical employed 6 doctors and had 11,000 registered patients.

Dr Mullan stated that he was a GP in the Riverside Practice in Strabane Health Centre for over 20 years. He noted that the practice had a patient population of approximately 7,500 and a make-up of six doctors and multi-disciplinary team members feeding into the practice team also. He stated that similarly to Dr Molloy and most GP colleagues, he had also a commitment to work sessions at the Covid Centre. He also has a role within the Trust as Associate Medical Director. He stated that he worked collaboratively with GP colleagues in the Trust to attempt to improve and develop services which was

paramount in this particularly challenging time and appreciated the opportunity to speak to the Committee.

Councillor McHugh thanked the GPs for attending the meeting. He stated that he firstly wished to clarify that the matter had been raised as a concern due to representations brought to him from constituents within the Derg DEA. Subsequently, he had been contacted by other residents from throughout the city and district. He stated that the matter had not been raised as any criticism of GPs or their staff and wished to take the opportunity to pay tribute to the sterling work carried out by GPs to provide a crucial service throughout the Council area.

Continuing, he noted that since the Covid restrictions were put in place, people had expressed concern that they were unable to see their GP on a face-to face basis as easily as they would have in previous circumstances. He stated that this had resulted in patients contacting a different practice or presenting themselves at the Emergency Department of their local hospital for treatment. This subsequently had the follow on effect of putting the emergency department under even more pressure. He stated that people had also expressed concern that regular clinics, such as for asthma or injections, had been postponed. However, no communication had been made outlining how long they would be postponed for or if they could obtain their medication by an alternative method. He stated that those experiencing mental health issues and requested a face-to-face meeting with a GP were finding it difficult to get an appointment. He stated that as an Elected Representative he wished to pass on those concerns to those who work in the medical profession. He asked if central government could assist in terms of allocating more resources to GPs to make it more accessible for patients to avail of crucial face-to-face appointments.

In response, Dr Molloy stated that when the pandemic had reached Northern Ireland, stories coming from other parts of Europe about hospitals and staff being overwhelmed were incomprehensible and that nobody had experienced anything like it. He stated that two health care streams were put in place at GP practices throughout the city and district; a Covid stream and non-Covid stream. He advised that if a person displayed symptoms of Covid or respiratory problems such as a cough or shortness of breath, it was presumed that if it was a new illness it could be Covid. Therefore, it would be dangerous to bring those people to the practice as they could spread the virus to staff,

doctors and other patients. He advised that GP practices were the non-Covid stream and that there was never any intention that GPs would cease to see patients. He did understand that in the process of getting the Covid centre set up which had been difficult that perhaps the Department of Health (DoH) and the Health Board who were also so busy, information had not been relayed to the public quickly enough.

Continuing, he referred to the phone based triage service being used at GP practices. He stated that some GP practices already used a phone based triage service, therefore it was the norm. He stated that the purpose of the phone system was initially to prevent patients coming to the practice with Covid symptoms. He stated that any patient coming to see a doctor were initially contacted by telephone to ensure that they did not have Covid symptoms. Any patient who described having such symptoms would be directed to the Covid centre. He stated that social distancing guidelines had to be followed in GP surgeries, therefore there would be a reduced number of patients allowed in at any one time. He advised that the ability to offer a completely open appointment system as it was prior to Covid, was hampered by the number of patients allowed in the waiting room at any one time. However, even with spacing appointments out over a longer period of time, the services are still available. He advised that whenever the first very strict lockdown happened, because of the transmission rates and the locality, the practice service reduced to only seeing those that absolutely needed face-to-face appointments. He referred to Councillor McHugh's comment regarding clinics and advised that the practice had ceased those clinics in the initial weeks of the lockdown as they were not deemed as absolutely essential. However, after a few weeks, the clinics had re-commenced.

Dr Molloy explained that going from an all appointment based system to a phone call based system, had meant that patients from throughout the Trust area had experienced difficulties in getting through to GP practices. He stated that as a member of the Local Medical Committee (LMC), he had contacted surgeries to remind them that patients should be seen when necessary. He emphasised that it was important to remind the public that GP practices were still open for business. However, it was not up to the LMC to police individual GP practices as they are individual businesses and independent contractors. In his opinion, the Board and agencies and the Council had been remarkably helpful to GPs in the area.

Continuing, he referred to the telephone triage system at Clarendon Medical Practice and stated that the telephone system there had approximately 10 lines. He advised that there were 5 or 6 doctors and the members of the multi-disciplinary team phoning patients each morning, coupled with patients attempting to phone into the surgery was a problem even before the pandemic. He stated that the Board had provided funding in the form of a telephony enhanced service for the practice to purchase a new phone system. He stated that inadequate phone systems in GP practices had caused difficulty for patients attempting to get through and hoped that the funding would be used by practices for new systems. However, he advised that problems with the phone systems were apparent prior to Covid and that some practices were also understaffed and these issues had been raised pre-pandemic. He stated that there was an ongoing issue of getting GP practices fully staffed, particularly in the Tyrone and Fermanagh areas. He stated that Dr O'Hare had to amalgamate three practices in the Castleterg area as they did not have the ability to maintain them separately.

Councillor Ferguson thanked the GPs for attending the Committee meeting. She stated that the request to speak with GPs was not based on criticism whatsoever but a need for re-assurance for constituents. She stated that she had received similar information prior to the pandemic, that her own GPs surgery was under pressure due to issues such as understaffing. She stated that she had been contacted by a constituent who had been advised by their GP practice in August, when restrictions had been relaxed, that there were no face-to-face appointments available. She advised that this person who was 32 weeks pregnant, subsequently presented themselves at the emergency department of their local hospital and after a four-hour wait had left. She stated that she had received concerns from rural constituents who had connectivity problems, therefore were unable to have a telephone triage call or video call with their practice. She stated that this had resulted in them not contacting their GP if they were feeling unwell. She asked what reassurance could be extended to those constituents on the matter.

In response, Dr Mullan stated that there was an ongoing balancing act in terms of managing Covid and non-Covid demand. He said that Councillor Ferguson's comments had highlighted the importance of relaying the message to the public that GP practices were still open for business and GPs actually preferred to see patients face-to-face. He advised that even when restrictions had eased, doctors still had to be

on their guard at all times to ensure a safe, working environment adding that GPs had to modify how they worked in terms of making sure all processes had been followed if they were seeing a patient on a face-to-face basis. He stated that GP practices were open for business, however it was now a more complex work day. He stated that this was due to issues such as managing phone call demand, then signposting patients to the appropriate service within the practice eg, home visit or face-to-face appointment. This was alongside managing daily pressures such as correspondence from hospitals.

Continuing, he advised that hospitals were also attempting to manage a Covid and non-Covid stream. This meant that the majority of outpatient appointments were also on a virtual basis which subsequently generated an extra workload for doctors. He referred to Councillor McHugh's comments on up-to-date communication and stated that it was challenging and difficult for GP practices. He noted that when the decision was made to cease clinics during the pandemic then re-commence them, patients were understandably frustrated that something they availed of in July or August were now not available due to the restrictions being back in place. He noted that a further 700 Covid cases have been reported in Northern Ireland in the past 24 hours therefore the situation was something that has to be balanced as not only are there patients out there who want to see a GP, there were some who were too frightened to leave the house to visit their doctor or even make a phone call. He referred to the issue regarding the lack of GPs in practices and emphasised the importance to push for the Graduate Entry Medical School at Magee as there is not been enough GPs or hospital doctors in this area per head of population. He stated that whilst GPs understood why patients want to see their GP, but noted that even before the pandemic, doctors were unable to see every single patient when they wished to be seen, except on an urgent basis. He advised that in order to cope with the demand for routine appointments there were other teams in the practices to assist with this including practice based physiotherapists, mental health practitioners and social workers. He stated that their work was invaluable in helping patients based on their particular need as they provided an excellent level of expertise and a phenomenal knowledge of all the services available to patients in the community and voluntary sector.

He stated that a positive element of the telephone triage service was the ability to direct patients appropriately and to ensure they were provided the proper care whilst also carrying out face-to-face appointments in a safe environment for both patients and staff.

Dr Molloy referred to the telephone triage system in GP practices and stated that some patients who found it difficult to access a suitable appointment time preferred to be contacted by telephone. He stated that the use of video calls was more suited to a very targeted group of patients and was available on request. He advised that if a patient was unable to send a photo or video, that usually generated the need for a face-to-face appointment. He stated that a telephone consultation did not replace the personal service provided by a face-to-face consultation. He further stated that going forward, a hybrid model was being considered in GP practices as the phone model suited some but not all, particularly the elderly.

Continuing, Dr Molloy advised that any patient who contacted a surgery and did not wish to give details of their specific health issue to a receptionist, they could ask to speak to a doctor directly. He felt that it was reasonable that a patient should not have to tell the receptionist what was wrong with them if they did not wish to, although it did assist in triaging patients to the appropriate service. He referred to the LMC conference that recently took place and noted that GPs had reported that the old style face-to-face consultation and all the various benefits that go with it should continue. He advised that any person at home who had found something such as a breast lump or losing weight, should not be sitting at home waiting for Covid to be over, they must visit their doctor to avail of the treatment they may need. He stated that all social distancing guidelines were in place at doctor's surgeries to ensure a very safe environment. He hoped that this would provide reassurance to those people petrified to leave their homes as they were afraid that they may catch the virus.

He referred to the Emergency Departments (ED) at local hospitals and advised that he and Dr Mullan were involved in a project called 'No More Silos', to attempt to streamline visitors to the ED. He advised that information on the project will be published in the coming weeks. He stated that the project focused on rather than a person presenting themselves at the emergency department in a hospital, there will be a telephone triage service to ensure that patients could only attend ED if it was necessary to do so. He advised that ambulatory pathways would be introduced, whereby instead of having to visit an emergency department, patients would actually go to an ambulatory care ward to be assessed by the appropriate physician/clinician. However, in the longer term more hospital beds were needed because even by trying to reduce who presented at ED, more elderly and vulnerable people would

require hospital care. He stated that the situation had worsened with the pandemic adding that the Trust had been remarkably helpful and supportive, even with the pressures it was experiencing with Covid-19. He advised that he recently covered a particularly busy shift at the Covid Centre and was worried that the numbers were not decreasing as hoped. He stated that his colleagues working in ICU at Altnagelvin were under extreme physical and emotional exhaustion as between 5 and 10 of those visiting the Covid Centre would end up in the hospital, with half of those then transferred to ICU 2 or 3 weeks later. He advised that with ICU already at capacity and the average occupancy in ICU for a covid person was three to four weeks, he was concerned that difficult decisions would have to be made.

Councillor Gallagher welcomed Drs Molloy and Mullan to the meeting. He stated that it was important to note that this was not about being critical of the jobs carried out by GPs during an extremely difficult time. However, Elected Representatives have been regularly contacted by constituents regarding issues within the health system. He stated that the public viewed GP practices as part of the NHS and not as private practices. Therefore, they had a perception that when someone had received treatment for whatever given reason and they did not, they did not understand the internal processes involved. He felt that the perception by the public was that there were different levels of engagement, access and treatment at GP surgeries. He advised that a constituent felt that their medical care had been withdrawn due to being refused access to their doctor's surgery because they were a frontline worker in a care facility. He felt that reports such as these had a negative impact on people throughout the city and district and had indeed, caused panic with some constituents. He suggested that a generic protocol be put in place regarding appointments and access to surgeries agreed among the practices.

In response, Dr Mullan stated that it would be physically impossible to have one protocol put in place that would be suitable for every practice. He advised that each practice had premises of different sizes with some only having one or two GPs. Therefore, each practice needed to come up with an individual system that helped manage the flow of demand from their patients. He stated that communication between GP practices and patients was important, however some practices had experienced difficulties in that regard. He noted that one of the clear benefits of the telephone triage system was the ability to direct a patient to the correct person for their appropriate needs. However, practices were experiencing difficulties in balancing the Covid with

non-Covid demand, such as the blood work and sample taking for patients who were currently unwell and also managing the testing for patients with chronic diseases and long term conditions. He advised that those particular patients would have been familiar with the system prior to Covid. However, when they rang the surgery they were advised of the operational changes within the practice during the pandemic. He stated that it was the responsibility of an individual practice to ensure that patients were kept up to date with the relevant information. He further advised that patients with an issue or who felt let down should raise it with their practice. He concurred that patients did have a perception that they could not get an appointment with a GP, however once they telephoned the surgery they realised that was not the case. He stated that direct interaction with each practice must continue as there would be subtle differences between practices and assured Members that no practice would be obstructive to that. He stated that GPs were attempting to manage that demand whilst ensuring that it was managed in a safe way for both the patient and the practice.

Councillor Reilly thanked the doctors for giving up their time and for sharing their expertise and experiences with Members. He asked how Council could assist with the work being carried out at GP practices from a corporate perspective. He referred to comments by Dr Molloy on the necessity of communication, and asked how Council could assist in broadcasting the wider communication across the Council area regarding the impact on the changes of services. He stated that there were issues regarding the new ways of working in GP practices due to the pandemic, therefore it was important to ensure that patients were not left behind in terms of connectivity. He stated that there were still many areas throughout the city and district where people did not have those types of technology and connectivity. He extended his thanks to both doctors and to all doctors throughout the Derry and Strabane area and stated that although the changes have been stark for some people regarding access to GP services, everyone understood that frontline staff were doing their utmost with the unprecedented pandemic.

Dr Molloy stated that it was important to get a consistent message across. He referred to Councillor Gallagher's statement regarding what people perceived whenever they see a service that was across the entire NHS. He stated sometimes GPs just encountered their own difficulties which may result in a poor service or what could potentially be seen as a poor service. He stated that if all GPs worked for the NHS

and were employed by the Trust then it would be possible to have more control over the system. He hoped that individuals within each practice would be open for all services as they were still seeing non-Covid patients therefore, they should contact their practice if they were feeling unwell. GPs have had to make slight changes to their systems to establish if patients had Covid-19 symptoms and also limit the number of people than can be admitted to a waiting room due to social distancing guidelines.

Continuing, he suggested that Council could help by working with the Trust in terms of communications regarding the 'No More Silos' project. He stated that this would assist in informing people that before considering going to ED, there was a new method of telephone triage system to establish a patient's needs.

Dr Mullan stated that Council support where there were likely to be changes would be helpful and that GPs would certainly engage with the Council on this. He stated that he hoped that Members would now be able to give some reassurance to their constituents, that although there may be different processes in place, that practices were still operational. He stated that when some patients presented themselves for treatment, other underlying concerns may become evident such as poverty, abuse or previous trauma. He felt that it was currently a very stressful time for people, particularly workers in the health and care sector and thanked Members for their appreciation. He stated that he also understood that it was a huge stress for people to get on with their daily lives. Therefore, helping people to live well during Covid was an important factor. He noted that whilst there were robust services within the community to support people to help them live well, the pandemic has had a dramatic impact on their health and wellbeing, particularly those in isolation. He stated that the Council and community services were crucial in providing the appropriate support and giving an overview on the situation. He expressed his thanks to Council for their assistance during this current, difficult climate. He stated that no matter what happened politically the message still needed to be that we must be on our guard, whether or not there were any relaxation of restrictions. He stressed that, until there were some definite outcomes regarding vaccines and safety, we are still in hugely uncertain times. He referred to the public health message around the simple things, distance, face and hand washing and stressed the importance of consistency with that message until it was confirmed that the country was Covid clear. However, in his opinion, he did not think this would be anytime soon.

Alderman Hussey also thanked the doctors for attending the meeting. He stated that like others, he had expressed concern that people were not seeking medical attention because of Covid. He stated that those people needed reassurance that they can access medical treatment. He referred to Dr Molloy's reference to Dr O'Hare, a well-respected GP in Castledearg. He stated that Dr O'Hare's had commented after the recent passing of his father, 'that Covid was something that we must learn to live with and get on with it.' He asked the GPs if they had any comment on that statement as it had struck a key note with a lot of people.

In response, Dr Molloy stated that he was unaware of the comments by Dr O'Hare. He said that some people flitted between the notion of 'we need to get on with it' and 'we need to be careful'. He stated that countries that had tried the let's just go for it approach, such as Sweden, initially saw some success rates. However, the infection rates then increased dramatically, similar to this area. He noted that whilst Sweden's economy had not suffered, the death rate was high. Therefore, Alderman Hussey's question was almost impossible to answer.

He felt that the first wave of the virus had minimum impact on people here, therefore it was difficult to comprehend the impact of the second wave. He felt that when the first wave had ended, people collectively were somewhat irresponsible over the summer and had forgot about the techniques that were important to keep the rate of infection down. He felt that, in his opinion, this resulted in the high infection rate in Derry and Donegal due to cross-border traffic etc. He stated that he was well aware of the economic impact throughout the city and district due to the closure of businesses. However, a lot of people now had someone known to them that has died with the virus and felt that it was easier to flip from the economic argument to, what is one life worth. He stated that he has taken part in some preliminary discussions recently regarding the vaccine. He advised that even the delivery of the vaccine, if and when it becomes available, may prove difficult due to storage issues. He outlined that patients would require 2 injections, 2 weeks apart with monitoring for some time afterwards. He stated that this required double the area needed when practices administered the flu vaccination.

Alderman Devenney welcomed the doctors to the meeting to provide Members with a comprehensive update on an extremely difficult

situation. He stated that they acknowledged the issues in the Strabane area regarding the lack of GPs even prior to the pandemic.

He referred to Dr Molloy's comments and welcomed the clarification provided that if a patient did not wish to give details of their health issue to a receptionist, they could ask to speak to a doctor directly. He stated that some patients felt embarrassed to discuss personal issues with a receptionist. He concurred with previous speakers that there was a public perception that doctor's surgeries were not taking appointments and believed that the message must be strengthened that doctors were available if needed. He stated that the Graduate Entry Medical School at Magee would alleviate some of the issues regarding GP recruitment however, it would be some time before this would be implemented. He referred to the winter flu vaccination programme and asked if the second batch of the vaccine had arrived at GP practices. He asked if there had been an increase of people wishing to have the vaccine and was it being offered to people who were housebound.

In response, Dr Molloy stated that there were difficulties regarding the flu vaccine for the over 65s and that the PHA had advised of unprecedented demand this year. He stated that this information had indicated a degree of success but also highlighted that people were worried that they would contract the flu as well as Covid-19. He reported that he recently received information from the PHA via the BMA that hopefully more of the vaccine should be available in the next week. He advised that, as in the previous year, if there were insufficient supplies of the vaccine for the over 65s, it may be possible to give them the vaccine for the under 65s. He stated that the majority of flu clinics took place in early October, therefore when a shortage of the vaccine had become apparent, most flu clinics had already taken place. He stated that most practices had not reported any issues on the matter. He advised that anyone who did not receive the vaccine at the flu clinic would be contacted to attend a 'catch-up' clinic. He stated that in December/January there would still be supplies of the flu vaccine available for anyone who wished to avail of it. He stated that in terms of patients at home, these would be treated by district nursing service and nursing home patients by the staff at that nursing home.

Dr Mullan stated that plans were in place in August regarding the programme for the flu vaccinations across the wider community with some practices amalgamating to offer the vaccination in schools. He stated that this initiative proved highly successful. He stated that every

practice had to come up with a way to issue the flu vaccinations in as safe and effective a way as possible. He referred to Alderman Devenney's comment regarding reception staff and advised that receptionist staff asked for details in order to help navigate them to an appropriate team member. However, if a patient felt uncomfortable or embarrassed, it was acceptable that they could speak directly to their GP. He stated that the information supplied by the receptionist was helpful and they were invaluable to the workforce by managing the flow of patients and the demand.

The Chair thanked Dr Molloy and Dr Mullan for taking the time to address the Health and Community Committee. He stated that their answers to Members queries and concerns were frank and comprehensive. He stated that the Committee Members and indeed, the vast majority of the public, were very aware of the unprecedented challenges and demands currently placed upon GPs. He hoped that burden would decrease in the very near future.

Chairperson's Business

HC192/20 Condolences

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, extended condolences to Alderman Maurice Devenney on the recent passing of his mother.

HC193/20 Mobile Phone Connectivity

Councillor Edwards thanked the Chair for permitting him to raise an issue regarding the lack of mobile phone connectivity in the wider Strabane area, particularly the Castletown and Urney Road areas. He stated that he has received numerous complaints from residents over a number of months on the matter and that 02 and Vodafone network providers were the most problematic.

Councillor Edwards Proposed, Seconded by Councillor Mooney

That Council writes to 02 and Vodafone regarding issues of mobile phone connectivity in the wider Strabane area, specifically Castletown and Urney Road.

Members agreed unanimously on the proposal.

The Committee

Recommended that Members approve to write to 02 and Vodafone regarding issues of mobile

phone connectivity in the wider Strabane area, specifically Castletown and Urney Road.

HC194/90 Employees within the Hospitality Sector

Councillor Harkin referred to recent events at Stormont which would have an effect on people throughout the city and district. He stated that Executive Parties have had to make a number of decisions over the past week regarding the restrictions on the hospitality sector. He stated that the DUP were now using the cross-community vote to veto any proposals regarding the easing of restrictions. This has resulted in the health and financial wellbeing of our people being put at stake. He stated that the DUP were undermining their authority by not making decisions on the matter and that Council needed to be clear in their opposition to this. He felt that workers within the hospitality sector were being used as a political football by politicians and the management of larger hospitality venues. He stated that suddenly, the government had expressed concern about the livelihoods of staff within that sector. However, there was no concern expressed in previous years from Stormont or the larger hospitality sector regarding workers such as zero hour contracts, young workers being paid below the minimum wage, and a raft of workplace issues for those employed across the sector.

He proposed that the Committee writes to the Executive to state that Council stands in solidarity with the UNITE hospitality branch and that workers in the sector should not be used as a political football to score points.

He stated that it was important to ensure that the health and wellbeing of workers within the hospitality sector was put first. The UNITE branch wish for the re-opening of the hospitality sector in an orderly and phased manner. He stated that a recovery plan was also needed for the workers as there was nothing currently in place to protect them when they were required to return to work.

Councillor Harkin Proposed, Seconded by Councillor Reilly

That Council will write to the Executive standing in solidarity with the UNITE Hospitality Branch and hospitality workers. Hospitality workers should not be used as a political football by the Stormont Executive and by big hospitality bosses.

Alderman Devenney stated that he supported Councillor Harkin's proposal. However, he stated that the DUP had debated the matter

over the past number of days and it was trying to achieve a fine balance between health and the re-opening of businesses in a balanced way. He stated that Councillor Harkin needed to be careful in his tone of language as his party were attempting to accommodate businesses re-opening in a safe manner.

Councillor Duffy stated that Alderman Devenney was attempting to re-write the recent events at Stormont. She stated that the DUP wanted businesses re-opened and used a cross-community veto to block a paper issued by the Minister for Health and advice from the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Officer on the health implications of taking such action. She stated that Sinn Fein had opposed the recommendation for businesses to re-open and that the SDLP had abstained which she described as disgraceful and that the DUP needed to take responsibility for putting something on the table which had to potential to cause excess deaths. She also felt that the SDLP should have come off the fence on the matter.

The Committee

Recommended **That Council will write to the Executive standing in solidarity with the UNITE Hospitality Branch and hospitality workers. Hospitality workers should not be used as a political football by the Stormont Executive and by big hospitality bosses.**

HC195/20 Matters Arising from the Open Minutes of the Health and Community Committee held on Thursday 15 October 2020.

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 October 2020 (HC166/20 –HC184/20) were confirmed and signed by the Chairperson.

Matters Arising from the Minutes

HC196/20 Inappropriate use of Fireworks (HC171/20)

Alderman Hussey welcomed the comments made at the previous committee meeting. However, he noted that some of the concerns raised had been put forward by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He asked if there was a possibility that Officers could consider those suggestions put forward by the RSPCA and indicate if any of those suggestions could be implemented by Council.

HC197/20 Pier at Newtownstewart (HC174/20)

Alderman Hussey requested an update on proposed repairs at the pier at a future Committee meeting. He stated that the former Chair of the Committee would be eager that the work was undertaken, particularly as a matter of health and safety at that facility.

Councillor Edwards echoed the comments on the matter by Alderman Hussey.

HC198/20 Land at Springhill, Strabane (HC180/20)

Alderman Hussey asked if Council had considered the possibility of a lease with an option to purchase contained within the agreement.

Councillor Edwards advised that it was his understanding that Council officers had approached the Springhill Community Association, stating that an agreement had been made to lease the land. However, it had been agreed at the full Council meeting on 29 October that Council would purchase the land and asked for clarity on the matter.

HC199/20 Playing Pitch Facilities (HC183/20)

Alderman Hussey concurred with the comments made by Councillor McHugh at the previous meeting on the matter. He expressed concern that no action had been taken and that there were a lot of recommendations within the strategy which he hoped would be followed through by Council. He referred to the shortage of provision in the Strabane rural area and that it was important that sports clubs had the proper facilities in order to keep people active. He stated that it was his understanding that flood drainage work had been carried out at Mitchell Park and asked if both pitches had re-opened for competitive football to take place. He also asked that in regard to Spamount, he understood that the changing room situation would be addressed and hoped this would be undertaken fairly quickly. He further queried if there were changing facilities at Vaughan's Holm, Newtownstewart in Council ownership.

Continuing, he expressed concern regarding the lack of 3G and 4G provision and floodlighting to enable clubs in the area to take part in night time training for players and members. He asked if this could be considered within the overall strategy.

In response, the Head of Community Development and Leisure suggested that he would ascertain the details on Alderman Hussey's queries from the relevant officers and provide an appropriate response.

HC200/20 Everybody Active 2020 Programme Year 4 2019/2020

The Head of Community Development and Leisure presented the above report, details of which had been previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to inform Members of the performance and outcomes of year 4 of the Everybody Active 2020 programme.

Councillor Mooney stated that it was evident from the report that a tremendous amount of work had been carried out in respect of the programme. He stated that a lot of results had been found by a lot of participants and that of the 12,345 people that had taken part in the programme, 1,325 had disabilities and 6,791 participants came from areas of high social need. He referred to the uncertainty of funding from Sport NI to continue the programme and proposed that the Committee write to Sport NI, or the relevant department, to ascertain if funding would become available to continue the programme. He stated that it was a worthwhile programme which had resulted in a lot of lifestyle changes for those who had taken part from throughout the city and district.

Councillor Mooney Proposed, Seconded by Alderman Devenney

That Members write to Sport NI or the relevant department, to ascertain if funding would become available to continue the Every Body Active Programme.

Councillor Logue thanked officers for the report and stated that it had been a very quick four years since the implementation of what she described as a very successful programme. She noted that the majority of targets had been reached with some actually being exceeded which was certainly to be welcomed. She stated that a review was carried out on all programmes to ascertain the success rate and that Council can be in no doubt that this programme was a great success. She stated that this and similar projects should continue to be funded for a further term and supported the proposal from Councillor Mooney.

The Committee

Recommended that (i) Members endorse the outcomes from the programme; and (ii) Council write to Sport NI or the relevant department, to ascertain if funding would become available to continue the Every Body Active Programme.

HC201/20 Covid-19 Access to Food Programme

The Head of Community Development and Leisure presented the above report, details of which had been previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to seek Members' approval for the allocation of funding provided by the Department for Communities (DfC), Voluntary and Communities Division (VCD) in response to the Covid-19 crisis under the Access to Food Programme.

Alderman Devenney welcomed the report. He stated that the Head of Community Development and Leisure had outlined the issues and the fact that it was the responsibility of the Local Growth Partnerships to allocate the funding and endorsed the recommendation within the report.

Councillor Ferguson welcomed the report and the funding of £82,000. She expressed her apprehension regarding Faughan and Waterside being categorised as one area and she had raised it previously with officers who advised that the urban areas had one worker each and that a facilitator was appointed 20 hours to cover both the Waterside and Faughan areas. She stated she understood that it was a finite budget that had to cover a wide area, particularly the Sperrin and the Derg DEAs where there was no previous provision provided. She further stated that many people from rural communities were too proud or were not aware to ask for help, therefore it was important to branch out and communicate to those areas. She felt that the Department for Communities (DfC) should be asked to consider having an individual worker for the Faughan DEA and more rural areas to tackle rural isolation and food poverty as many people from those areas were reluctant to come forward.

Councillor Burke thanked the officers for the report. She stated that Sinn Féin was happy to endorse the proposal to allocate the funding for the Access to Food Programme. She stated that it was vital for those experiencing hardship across the entire city and district and welcomed that people would be receiving assistance. In relation to the

wrap around approach being taken, this was welcomed as it was key to providing the meaningful change and help for constituents within the communities. She stated that she was aware that Members of the Committee had recently received an email from the Outer West Family Support Hub regarding the allocation of the facilitators of the budget for the Foyleside DEA Access to Food Programme. She stated that it was her understanding that this group delivered the previous food programme and expressed concern that the Foyleside LGP had not had the opportunity to have a dedicated discussion regarding the programme, including the facilitator's budget issue. She stated that she was confident that Council officers would clarify the matter and it was her understanding that the group involved had raised the concerns with LGP but had yet to receive a response. She asked if officers could ensure that concerns can be addressed given the factors outlined.

In response, the Head of Community Development and Leisure stated that he was aware of the communication from the Outer West Family Support Hub. He referred to the report which outlined that the allocation was to each of the Local Growth Partnerships and advised that officers would will go back to each of those partnerships to seek clarification on the delivery plans of those partnerships. He advised that Council officers did not have a role to instruct anyone within those Local Growth Partnerships. However, if Members agreed, they would liaise with the Foyleside Local Growth Partnership and ask that the matter be discussed.

Councillor Burke thanked the Head of Community Development and Leisure for the response. However, she stated that whilst she appreciated the general rule that each LGP reached a consensus, she made reference to the Council's code of practice towards the LGP regarding decision making and expressed concern that an opportunity was not given in this regard. She stated that she wished to ensure that proper process was being upheld.

The Chair stated that he wished to welcome the next speaker, Councillor Emmet Doyle as the new Aontu representative on Council.

Councillor Doyle stated that he sought clarification regarding the funding allocations outlined within the recommendations. He understood that there was a finite amount of funding available but asked if any work had been done in terms of identifying need as opposed to allocating funding across three different electoral wards.

In response, the Head of Community Development and Leisure advised that he would provide Councillor Doyle with the exact detail of the funding model used. However, when Council previously made allocations of Grant Aid or funding of this nature, the advice services model had been used. He advised that the model ensured that funding was provided based on deprivation, population and rurality and allocating it to the eight Local Growth Partnerships.

Councillor Harkin stated that no matter how much funding was allocated by the Department for Communities (DfC) to this Council area it would be insufficient and would not address the poverty and deprivation throughout the city and district. In response to issues raised by Councillor Burke, he stated that the Executive had been recently criticised for handing out over £500,000 to windfarm companies that did not ask for it and that politicians were asked to resign, due to money in their bank accounts that they were unaware of. He stated that it been a very difficult and arduous process unfortunately in the Foyleside DEA to reach an agreement on the matter. However, an agreement had been reached and as previous comments had alluded to, it was not the responsibility of Council officers to dictate and intervene as it was the responsibility of the Local Growth Partnerships. He referred to the Community Resilience Plan implemented in March 2020. He advised that he and other Elected Representatives attended meetings to discuss criticisms and proposals on how to improve the plan based on frustrations expressed by people within the community resilience plan and those who were excluded. He welcomed that some of the recommendations made from those meetings had been taken on board. He welcomed that instead of creating a new system of food distribution, Council would access the food distribution that existed already in the district with groups such as Foyle Food Bank at the centre of the programme which made more sense from a strategic point of view. He suggested that Council officers note the issues raised, however, plans have been agreed in all of the DEAs which were currently being implemented.

Councillor Burke reiterated that she had proposed that Council ensured that due process was followed. She stated that she was in no doubt that great work has been carried out and it had been difficult to reach an agreement. However, a process was in place that must be followed and it was her understanding that agreement had been reached before concerns had been addressed and that everyone who wished to engage on the matter should have the opportunity to do so.

Councillor Durkan stated that as a Foyleside Councillor she had engaged and worked with those involved in the Foyleside response who were responsible for the distribution of food boxes during the pandemic. She stated that as Councillor Harkin had stated, lessons were learnt from the first time. She advised that discussions, suggestions and criticisms had taken place and that everyone had the opportunity to engage. She stated that the plan was about using existing resources and being better prepared and how to put resources to better use; not about undermining anyone. She felt that as a Councillor and someone that engaged on the board that she was satisfied that due process was followed and the plan came out of a very inclusive, fair and participatory process and reassured Members that this was the case in terms of moving forward. She stated that whilst Council's role was not to interfere, Members therefore must be mindful not to set a precedent in the matter.

Councillor Donnelly stated that he had made the point on a number of occasions that there was a significant section of the community who did not view the current structures or did not engage or participate in them. He felt that this debate had fuelled those views regarding gatekeeping and control. He stated that those who did not buy into the current structures, did so for legitimate reasons, however, they were also part of the community as ratepayers and Council should be reaching out more to facilitate those people.

Councillor Carr stated that he concurred with the sentiments expressed by Councillor Durkan. He stated that as a Councillor in the Foyleside DEA due process had taken place in the matter. He stated that people chose not to engage with the process from the beginning and it was clear from the communications to Council on the matter.

Alderman Guy concurred with the comments made by Councillor Harkin and welcomed the participation of Foyle Food Bank in the programme. He welcomed the more stringent process this time round as in March 2020, there were problems with distribution and families being excluded from the scheme. However, with the use of Foyle Food Bank and the Trussell Trust, Council was more equipped to deal with such situations.

The Committee

Recommended that Members approve the following allocations, subject to Letter of Offer

confirmation from Department for Communities and confirmation of Lead Partners from each of the Growth Partnerships who will receive the Letter of Offer in the respective DEA/DEAs: Waterside/Faughan £11,300; Moor £7,100; Foyleside £7,100; Ballyarnett £7,100; Strabane/Sperrin/Derg £30,344; An allocation to Apex Living Centre £20,000.

HC202/20 Covid-19 Financial Inclusion Partnership Fund

The Head of Community Development and Leisure presented the above report, details of which had been previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to seek Members' approval of the Covid-19 Financial Inclusion Partnership Fund proposal and for the allocation of funding to each of the advice agencies, subject to receipt of the Letter of Variance to the Community Support Letter of Offer from the Department for Communities (DfC).

Councillor Farrell thanked the Head of Community Development and Leisure for the report. He stated that there was clearly a definite need for enhanced advice services throughout the Council area, therefore, the additional funding was welcomed. He stated that the economic impact of Covid-19 had been severe with uncertainty of what the long term implications of this would be. He reported that in the last year, there were 2,300 extra people claiming unemployment benefits in this Council area. He stated that these people required free, impartial, professional advice regarding benefit entitlement, employment rights and redundancies. He expressed confidence that Advice North West, the Resource Centre and Dove House were more than capable of providing that much needed advice. He stated that he was conscious that the funding was only in place until March 2021 and the SDLP would be keen to ensure that these enhanced services were maintained after that date. He noted that this Council area had the highest rate of unemployed in the North of Ireland, the highest rate of sickness benefit claimants and pension credit claimants. This, coupled with the uncertainty of Covid-19 and in relation to Brexit in January 2021, strengthened the argument for a fully funded, permanent advice service. He stated that he endorsed the recommendation within the report.

Councillor Duffy stated that as a Board Member of Advice North West, she had witnessed a significant increase in the work undertaken by the organisation, particularly during the pandemic. She stated that her Party welcomed the funding and thanked the Minister for Communities for her assistance.

Councillor Harkin stated that he also supported the recommendation within the report. He stated that as a Board Member on Advice North West, he fully understood how the employees were overwhelmed with the increase in demand. He stated that this was also true for the other advice service providers throughout the city and district and he noted that there were many other organisations that had attempted to assist due to the massive increase in poverty. He felt that, in his opinion, from previous discussions these issues had existed before the pandemic as a result of the implementation of welfare reform. However, it has become significantly worse due to the pandemic. He stated that advice service providers needed to recruit more staff to cope with the increase in people contacting them due to experiencing the harsh realities of redundancy, furlough, job security and a reduction in working hours. He added that these people were not aware of their basic employment rights or how to apply for assistance. He stated that whilst the funding was needed, he felt that it was not an anti-poverty strategy. He stated that in his opinion, it was an attempt to help those who were struggling with poverty and that any kind of strategy from the Stormont Executive or DfC that attempted to address the issues that give rise to the need for the expansion of advice services was currently out of reach. He stated that even with the additional funding, the workers would still be overwhelmed. He noted that a recent newspaper article had reported that almost 27% of children in this area were living in poverty which he described as disgraceful, with no plan to do anything about it. He emphasised the importance that an anti-poverty strategy needed to be implemented as soon as possible.

Alderman Devenney stated that the DUP supported the recommendation within the report. He commended all the advice service providers throughout the city and district who delivered a very vital service, particularly in pre-Covid times but yet again Covid had exacerbated the situation and had increased the workload of those providers.

Alderman Hussey welcomed the initiative and in particular the funding to Advice North West and hoped there would be considerable outreach, particularly to the rural areas, which was needed in these

areas. He stated that the communication of the availability of the service would be very important within the overall funding package, also that there was knowledge distributed to the rural areas to those who needed it and details of when and where it would be available.

The Chair stated that he wished to add his support for the recommendation.

The Committee

Recommended that Members (i) approve the Covid-19 Financial Inclusion Partnership Fund proposal and (ii) approve the allocation of funding to each of the advice agencies as follows, subject to receipt of the Letter of Variance to the Community Support Letter of Offer from the Department of Communities: Advice North West, £57,796; Dove House, £11,935 and Resource Centre Derry, £2,330.

HC203/20 Electromagnetic Fields from 5G Base Stations

The Head of Health and Community Wellbeing presented the above report, details of which had been previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to update Members on the results of an OFCOM survey of Radio Frequency Electromagnetic Fields (RF EMF) following an audit of a number of 5G base stations located across the UK.

Councillor Farrell thanked the Head of Health and Community Wellbeing for carrying out research and contacting OFCOM in relation to the matter. He noted that residents living within the vicinity of the masts needed reassurance that they presented no danger to their health or wellbeing. He noted that OFCOM had advised that there would be a cost of £1,000 for taking measurements at a base station mast. However, there would be no charge for testing for those base stations located close to schools if concerns were raised by those schools. He noted that the schools had been contacted on the matter and proposed that Council contact St Brigid's College and St Paul's Primary School, who were located in the vicinity of the mast at the Glengalliagh Road area of the city, to establish if they would be contacting OFCOM to have the mast tested. He stated that he was

unsure of the location of the base station at Strand Road and if there were any schools in the immediate vicinity and asked officers to identify the location.

Councillor Duffy stated that when she had raised the matter in September there had been a huge interest in the local area and that residents of the area were fearful after a video had been circulated on social media stating that the mast was causing a danger to health. She suggested that Council agree to have the masts tested and did not believe that the cost was extortionate. She suggested that if testing could be carried out for free then proceed, however, they should be tested regardless as Council had a duty to those residents to give them some reassurance as to the safety of the mast.

Councillor Farrell Proposed, Seconded by Councillor Duffy

That Council contact St Brigid's College and St Paul's Primary School, who were located in the vicinity of the masts at the Glengalliagh Road, and Strand Road, to establish if they would be contacting OFCOM to have the mast tested. If this was not the case, Council should pursue having the measurements carried out at a cost of £1,000.

Councillor Ferguson asked if it was the responsibility of the school to request testing or could Council submit a request on their behalf. She welcomed the report and thanked the officers for all their work undertaken on the matter.

Councillor Farrell stated that it was important to get clarification on how close the schools needed to be to the masts and base stations to have them tested.

Alderman Guy indicated that the base station at Strand Road was located opposite B&M stores.

The Chair stated that he had also raised the matter at Council in 2019, and noted that his concerns on the matter had been somewhat allayed and the comments from Councillors Duffy and Farrell had addressed any further concerns he may have and therefore supported the proposal.

Alderman Hussey stated that Council should record its disappointment that a body with a regulatory purpose was seeking to charge £1,000 for testing.

Councillor Doyle referred to the video that had been circulated some months back on social media which he described as a disgrace. He stated that whilst there were genuine concerns raised regarding the safety of the mast, Council must rely on scientific evidence and not the agenda of conspiracy theorists. He stated that the Committee had a previous discussion on food poverty and he did not think it was suitable to use ratepayer's money on testing 5G masts as the result of a video. He stated that whilst Council had a duty of care to residents in the area, it should be mindful not to be pandering to conspiracy theorists.

Councillor Farrell stated that Council were not pandering to conspiracy theorists but were responding to genuine concerns raised by people who were afraid for their health and wellbeing after viewing the video that had been posted on social media. He felt that this method would prove the safety of the mast. He stated that he understood Councillor Doyle's concerns regarding the testing costs, therefore it has been proposed to contact those schools from the area to establish if they were requesting to have the mast tested at no cost to the ratepayers.

The Committee

Recommended **that Council contact any schools located in the vicinity of the masts at Glengalliagh Road and Strand Road area of the city, to establish if they would be contacting OFCOM to have measurements taken at the mast. If this was not the case, Council should pursue having measurements taken at the masts.**

HC204/20 Grant Funding to Support Market Surveillance and Effective Implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol, with respect to the supply of safe consumer products

The Head of Health and Community Wellbeing presented the above report, details of which had been previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to seek Members' approval of grant funding and associated agreement between the Secretary of State for

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC), in order to support safety related surveillance of the consumer product marketplace and to ensure effective implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol, past the end of the UK/EU transition period on 1 January 2021.

Alderman Guy stated that the UUP were totally opposed to the Northern Ireland Protocol and that the added costs were not helpful to Northern Ireland businesses and consumers. He queried if the Head of Health and Community Wellbeing felt that the £55,000 from 23 October 2020 to 13 March 2021 was adequate for staff and associated costs.

In response, the Head of Health and Community Wellbeing stated that the Environmental Health Departments within the eleven councils held discussions in relation to the funding. He advised that the general consensus was that the current level of funding allocated should be sufficient. However, the level of funding beyond March 2020 was not confirmed and this will be kept under review if Members agreed to proceed.

Aldermen Guy and Hussey stated that they wished to abstain from the item.

Councillors Ferguson and Duffy endorsed the recommendation within the report.

In response to a query by Councillor Duffy if Aldermen Guy and Hussey were Members of the Committee, it was confirmed that Alderman Hussey was a Member.

Alderman Devenney noted that the DUP would also be abstaining.

The Committee

Recommended that Members approve the grant funding agreement between Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC) in order to build capacity and capability for market surveillance in the DCSDC area during 2020/21.

Open for Information

HC205/20 Covid-19 Community Recovery Plans

The Head of Community Development and Leisure presented the above report, details of which had been previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to provide Members with details of the Covid-19 Community Recovery Plans received from the eight Local Community Growth Partnership Boards.

Councillor Burke stated that she wished to place on record Sinn Féin's concern in relation to the issues that have arisen around the Foyleside proposal and the fact that no dedicated meeting of the Foyleside LGP had taken place to discuss the contents of the plan which is being presented to the Committee today. She stated that it was her Party's understanding that two community organisations within the LGP had asked for a meeting to be held last week to try and gain consensus on the plan as they had their own suggestions of what could be added to the version that is before us today but to date this has not happened. She advised that the Sinn Féin Councillor on the Foyleside LGP has confirmed that this request was made and we are confident that the council officers and other Councillors on the LGP can confirm this.

She noted that she had already made reference to the Councils Code of Practice for LGP's regarding decision making and was aware of the Council's interpretation of the LGP Code of Practice around LGP's reaching a consensus on proposals as the preferable option. However, if this is not achievable then a vote should be taken amongst LGP members. She expressed concern that on this occasion it appears that a vote was proposed on the Foyleside recovery plan before any final meeting was held. Apparently this was based on the presumption that a final consensus could not be reached on a recovery plan even though this had been achieved for the previous recovery plan earlier this year.

Continuing, she felt that this had led to a number of LGP members not voting on the basis that they felt proper process had not been followed. These members later expressed their concerns in writing to both Council and the LGP but ultimately were told by Council officers that they could not force a meeting to be held. She stated that her Party did not believe this represented good governance and are also concerned that the Code of Conduct has no arbitration mechanism when a significant number of LGP members do not agree with how a process has been conducted. She stated that Sinn Féin are not asking for a response to these comments but would like them to be formally recorded in the minutes.

The Committee

Recommended **that Members note the contents of the Covid-19 Community Recovery Plans for the 7 DEAs and Strabane Town.**

HC206/20 EU Exit and NI Protocol: Imported food checks at points of entry/ports

The Head of Health and Community Wellbeing presented the above report, details of which had been previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to update Members on the UK Governments approach to implementing the Northern Ireland Protocol and the work being carried out to prepare for the additional checks which may be required under EU law on agri-foods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

Councillor Logue stated that she wished to register Sinn Féin's concern regarding news circulating from food industries such as Sainsbury's that they had expressed concerned regarding food shortages in the coming months.

The Committee

Recommended **that Members note the contents of the report, including the work being carried out to prepare for the additional checks which may be required under EU law on agri-foods moving from GB to NI.**

HC207/20 Correspondence

The Director of Health and Community presented the above report, details of which were previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to update Members on correspondence received by Council.

The Committee

Recommended that Members note the contents of the report.

HC208/20 Consultations

The Director of Health and Community presented the above report, details of which were previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to update Members on consultations received by Council.

The Committee

Recommended that Members note the contents of the report.

The meeting went into Confidential Business.