

## Derry City and Strabane District Council

**Open Minutes of the Meeting of Health and Community Committee of Derry City and Strabane District Council held remotely on Thursday 14 January 2021 at 4.00pm.**

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

**Non-members of Committee:- Aldermen Hussey, Kerrigan, McClintock and Ramsey; Councillors J Boyle, Carr, Donnelly, Doyle, Durkan, Fleming, Gallagher, Kelly and McCann.**

**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).**

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### **HC1/21 Notice and Summons for Meeting**

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

### **HC2/21 Members Attendance and Apologies**

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

### **HC3/21 Statement for Remote Meetings**

The Chair read the statement for remote meetings.

### **HC4/21 Declarations of Members' Interests**

Councillor Ferguson declared an interest in agenda item 11 – Department of Justice Consultation on Enhancing Legal Protections for Victims of Domestic Abuse – Draft Response.

Alderman Hussey declared an interest in agenda item 13 – NI Executive Support Programmes: Warm, Well and Connected and the Volunteering Programme Update.

### **Open for Decision**

#### **HC5/21 Deputation: To receive Prof Anthony Staines, Dublin City University and Prof Helen Dolk, Ulster University – Zero Covid Group (Independent Scientific Advocacy Group):**

The Chair welcomed the representatives of the Zero Covid Group, Professor Anthony Staines, of Dublin City University and Professor Helen Dolk, Ulster University and invited them to make their presentation to the Committee.

Professor Staines gave a brief overview to the Committee regarding the Zero Covid Group. He stated that the group was attempting to bring lives back to normal as quickly and expeditiously as possible. He stated that Covid-19 had significantly impacted both parts of this island and the United Kingdom and had been horrendously difficult for everyone. He explained that he had trained in the UK in medicine and public health and had also worked in the South of Ireland for several years. He believed that the current analysis illustrated that the island was under severe restrictions, essentially to protect the health service and reduce the number of coronavirus cases. He stated that there had previously been several lockdowns in Ireland and parts of the UK of various degrees of severity and complexities. He believed that once the current restrictions would cease, the case numbers would once again increase.

Continuing he noted that the rate of infection in the South of Ireland had decreased to single figures by June 2020. Subsequently, a decision had been made to re-open the economy. He stated that infection rates steadily rose again once the economy had re-opened until the second lockdown in October 2020. He stated that the second lockdown had reported almost 1000 cases per day and it was felt that the health system would come under serious stress if that continued. He further stated that when the country opened up again for Christmas with about 200 cases per day it was now running at 3,000 to 4,000 cases per day. He expressed concern that the health service, which has substantially less capacity than the health services in most other parts of the UK, was creaking at the seams.

He stated that the Zero Covid Group was asking the government to consider using the current lockdown to achieve several goals. He noted that the current plan of the government in the South, is that people would live with the virus. Therefore, cases of infection would reduce to a reasonable figure, open up again and as the number of cases rose again, subsequently close. He stated that it was hoped that the vaccine would eventually eradicate the virus. He noted that the timescale for vaccine deployment in the Republic was the end of September 2021, with England and Wales at the end of October 2021. He advised that he did not have the details for Northern Ireland but assumed that it would be similar. He stated that from a business perspective, vaccinating a large number of the population would not prevent viral spread of the infection. He referred to the Manaus area of Brazil, which was slightly larger than Dublin, where 60% of the population was infected with Covid-19. He stated that a report had been published stating that 60% was enough to suppress infection. He noted that virologists had reported that 60% was not sufficient to suppress a further outbreak, it was closer to 80%. He advised that this would mean that 8 out of 10 people had to be vaccinated to stop the spread of the virus in Ireland and the UK. He expressed concern that the implications of not taking action, it was expected to have further episodes of lockdown over the course of the Spring and Summer, with substantial damage to the economy, tourism and to people's lives.

Continuing, Professor Staines stated that the group had suggested a number of actions such as aggressive suppression; with the idea being to reduce the number of cases and to prevent new cases coming in. He stated that whilst it may seem controversial, unfortunately it was probably very necessary. He noted that 50,000 people flew in to the Republic of Ireland over the Christmas period which contributed to the major outbreak we are now experiencing. He stated that managing travel within the Republic of Ireland and between the South and North of Ireland would be controversial but possible. He advised that travel restrictions between counties was already in place with proposals to extend those restrictions along the border areas. He felt that a special arrangement was needed at the border regions for people who live on one side of the border but may work on the other side. He stated that discussions had taken place with government officials, politicians and the police on both sides of the border to assess the feasibility of such actions. He stated that it was important to continue with all the steps to prevent the spread of infection such as wearing masks, hand hygiene and proper ventilation until the virus was eliminated. He noted that a

recent opinion poll had reported a widespread acceptance of these changes and behaviour.

He referred to contact tracing and stated that South of the border had failed to carry out this out properly. He stated that people were only asked about their movements for the 48 hours before they presented for testing, therefore it was difficult to establish where they became infected. He stated that identifying and testing cases rapidly, contact tracing and supported isolation was vital. He referred to those required to isolate and expressed concern that many people who had to isolate were not being paid by their employer. He stated that better financial support was needed in this regard and that the impact of isolation must be seriously considered. He further stated that the mental health impact of the restrictions in place also need to be seriously considered to help people to cope. He stated that there were many people who, for example, cared for vulnerable adults. If those carers were required to isolate, who was going to care for those people they were responsible for. He stated that it was important for all of these practical issues to be considered.

Continuing, he referred to regional control, and stated that when cases of infection decreased on both sides of the border, these areas could be managed differently. He advised that after discussions with the Dublin and Belfast Chambers of Commerce, the cycle of opening and closing of businesses was extremely damaging to business and the economy. He stated that in New Zealand and Australia there was very little foreign tourism and workers to those countries. He stated that Australians were taking their holidays at home this year and felt that people from Northern Ireland could support the local hospitality industry if they took similar steps. However, this could only happen if the number of cases can be restricted. He felt that it was likely that even if the number of cases was driven to zero, there would be further outbreaks. For example, in Australia they were investigating outbreaks in Brisbane and an area of Sydney and those areas have been closed by a fairly intense but routine public health measure. He stated that apart from those outbreaks, life, businesses and the economy were back to normal, with Covid rapidly becoming an unpleasant memory.

Professor Staines advised the Committee that more information regarding the work of the Zero Covid Group could be found at the following websites:

<https://www.isagcovid19.org>

[https://e2ce7631-765d-43bc-802c-4092e3250e22.filesusr.com/ugd/e42b58\\_106bab46da0b412c9b116e81cc65d1ea.pdf](https://e2ce7631-765d-43bc-802c-4092e3250e22.filesusr.com/ugd/e42b58_106bab46da0b412c9b116e81cc65d1ea.pdf)

Professor Dolk stated that since the beginning of the pandemic it had become apparent that by the cycle of lockdowns and allowing the virus numbers to increase was not good for health and business. She stated that it was important to get the infection rate down to as low as possible and keep it low. She stated that in order to do this, it was important to act early. She expressed concern that in the UK and Northern Ireland there was a problem in terms of being late in agreeing on the actions. She stated that it was also important that businesses had to be immediately supported during the lockdowns. She expressed concern at the pressures currently faced by the health service in coping with both Covid and non-Covid conditions. Continuing, she stated that since the first lockdown in March 2020, there was a potential problem, although not a lot of actual data, regarding isolation. She noted that testing and tracing was carried out, however, this was of no use unless people were able to isolate for the 10-14 days to prevent further transmission of the virus. She reported that UK wide evidence suggested that many people were not financially able to isolate as required. She stated that steps had to be taken to increase the financial compensation for people to enable them to isolate appropriately as isolation was at the core of virus control.

She referred to isolation and quarantine at border areas with its individual implications and that it would be useful to co-ordinate more with the South. She stated that both sides need to resolve issues such as restrictions being imposed at different times and the types of quarantine imposed for international travellers in the North and the South. She referred to the internal border of East/West, between Northern Ireland and other countries of the UK, which should be viewed as a pandemic control border and not Brexit. She emphasised that it was necessary to consider restrictions at that border in order to allow Northern Ireland to get the virus levels to decrease. She stated that this could be achieved either by quarantine or the requirements for negative testing.

Continuing, she advised on the advancing science on how the virus was transmitted. She stated that there was more emphasis on aerosol transmission as opposed to surfaces and droplet transmission. She stated that this meant that the virus was transmitted over longer distances and that improved ventilation was required in shops,

restaurants and places of work to make them safer. She felt that more could be done in regard to ventilation and people's understanding of ventilation. She stated that it was important to have a goal and as Professor Staines had outlined, the goal was to be keep the virus down really low, almost at zero, to ensure that community transmission was virtually eliminated. She stated that such action was better for the economy rather than letting businesses open up as soon as possible, only to result in further lockdowns.

She referred to the mass vaccination programme and stated that it was projected that the programme in Northern Ireland would be taking place by the end of Summer 2021. She stated that at that point, it was hoped by approaching herd immunity, that businesses could reopen. However, they should not open up earlier than or give in to calls to open up as soon as the most vulnerable were vaccinated. She stated that this would result in extremely high virus levels with resulting major implications for both health and the economy.

The Chair thanked Professors Staines and Dolk for the informative presentation and invited comments from Members.

Councillor R Barr thanked the representatives for the presentation. He asked their views on an all-Ireland strategy, in terms of implementation of guidelines and combining resources to tackle Covid-19. He also asked their views on airports remaining open for domestic flights in the country.

In response, Professor Dolk felt that the more co-ordination that took place throughout the island of Ireland the better. She stated that Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, depended on the UK for financial aid for businesses and testing services. She stated that a co-ordinated strategy was needed throughout Ireland but also across the UK. She felt that whilst it was a complicated situation, the North and South could have done more to co-ordinate this over the past year. She stated that in terms of airports, more response was needed to the possibility of a new variant of the virus and that travel should be restricted within the UK. She felt that there was a large proportion of the new variant at this point. Therefore, it was too late to take action. However, as time goes on it was important to be more open to restrictions to travel to other countries in the UK. She stated that this may result in imposing quarantine in order to manage the situation and also to co-ordinate what was happening in the South. She stated that officials in the South of Ireland had decided not to introduce a Covid

elimination policy. She stated that Northern Ireland would also not agree but for different reasons. She stated that a similar strategy to that taken in Australia must be considered for Ireland and the UK.

Professor Staines stated that the Australian state borders have been opened for over 100 years and this is the first time in living memory, that they had closed. He stated that once closed, special arrangements were put in place for those who lived close to the border or who worked across the border. He stated that this worked to minimise the hardship and significant disruption and as a temporary measure, was worth considering.

Councillor McHugh thanked the representatives for attending the meeting. He stated that Ireland was a small country with two jurisdictions and it made absolute sense for the problem to be approached with an all-Ireland, coherent strategy. He advised that Sinn Féin had called for such a strategy from the outset of the pandemic. He stated that his comments did not emanate from any party political ideology. However, if both sides of the border concentrated resources and had a harmonious strategy within both jurisdictions, then promoting the preservation of life would be apparent and should be the main focus.

Alderman Devenney felt that the impact of the virus had been a difficult time for everyone due to the severe restrictions which were put in place to keep the infection rate down and protect the health service. He agreed that it would be an open and closed situation for businesses and the economy until some normality was reached. He felt this could only be achieved by the mass roll-out of the vaccine. He expressed concern that certain vaccination programmes in the UK would not take place until the Spring of 2022.

He referred to the comments made by Professor Dolk regarding Northern Ireland and the UK being late on imposing restrictions. He noted that currently the situation in the Republic of Ireland, despite all the measures and restrictions in place, reported the highest rate of infection across the world per head of population. He referred to comments regarding domestic flights and whilst he understood that it was a complicated issue, anyone entering NI should take a test before their arrival. He asked if Professor Dolk agreed, that anyone who travelled to a country with a negative test result would not be required to isolate.

Councillor Harkin thanked the representatives from the Zero Covid group to the meeting. He noted that People Before Profit had made the proposal for the group to present to the Committee. He regretted that the proposal had not been brought forward at the beginning of the pandemic. He stated that the current situation across the island was appalling. He believed that in his opinion, the economy had not been protected by the coalition government or by the Stormont Executive. He stated that they had also failed to protect people's lives and the health service. He felt that the health service was creaking due to the policies emanating from both governments on this island who were incapable of developing an all-island strategy to deal with the pandemic. He stated that it was not about borders but having a rational policy to deal with a health crisis. He felt that the rise of infection rates and mortality due to Covid-19 did not need to happen as there were other strategies that could have been implemented such as the Zero Covid Strategy. He stated that this meant not pandering and opening businesses because of lobbying and implementing half measures which resulted in a lot of community transmission. He believed that Council should have been able to take decisive steps at the beginning across the island and by doing this, it would have been a situation similar to New Zealand.

He stated that the implementation of the vaccine had brought hope. However, mass vaccinations would not take place for some months. He stated that the Stormont Executive and the Dáil were informed that infection rates would be out of control at this time of year, due to winter transmission of other viruses such as flu. However, they both opened up the economy before Christmas. He felt that those institutions were culpable for putting the health service under severe pressure and the rise in infection rates and that they had attempted to blame the public for their policies. He urged the Political Parties to give the proposals from the Zero Covid Group serious consideration.

In response, Professor Dolk stated that it would be worth asking for a formal evaluation of the zero Covid elimination option as in the South, it was mentioned as an option. However, in the North it has been roundly ignored by the Executive and she felt that it should be considered at the very least with reasons given why it was not being followed. He felt that the group was owed an explanation why the zero Covid option was not being considered by the Executive, particularly by the Minister for Health. She stated that more transparency was needed in the evidence being used to shape policy such as where was the transmission occurring and in what settings. She stated that a more

evidence based approach to the problems was needed rather than implying that it was due to lack of compliance by sections of the population in a generalised manner.

Alderman Hussey noted that the situation had already been referred to where the Republic of Ireland reported the worst infection rate in the world. He stated that Northern Ireland was in the best position within the British Isles, with one case in every 200. He stated that whilst he was mindful of those who called for an all-Ireland strategy, he noted that New Zealand was not one island. He suggested that a British Isles approach was a more logical step given the inter-dependency between all parts of those isles. He concurred with the remarks made that the stop start regime has been extremely detrimental to businesses and from a business perspective, it would have been more beneficial to re-open when it was proper and safe to do so. He stated that the health service was currently overwhelmed and felt that a much more stringent enforcement of the regulations was needed to have a significant impact regarding the spread of infection. He asked the representatives if they had asked to make presentations to the relevant administrations at the Dáil and the Stormont Executive, in particular to the Minister for Health. He stated that Mr Swann, Minister for Health, was doing a tremendous job and felt that the Minister would take all options and solutions into consideration and if so, what has been the response.

Councillor Edwards concurred with the previous speakers on the need for an all-Ireland approach to the pandemic. He noted that in the spring of 2020, this Council area had the second lowest rate of Covid infection in the whole of Northern Ireland and by Autumn this had risen to one of the highest in the UK. He referred to community transmission and stated that he had witnessed complacency by some members of the public towards the restrictions and this has resulted in a rise in community transmission. He asked how this issue could be acted upon.

Councillor Ferguson welcomed the different strategies put forward by the Zero Covid Group. She referred to comments that a decrease of 60% of the infection rate was not necessarily enough for herd immunity and noted that some people were opposed to vaccinations. She stated that anti-vaccine campaigners were relaying misinformation on social media and asked what the outcome would be if not enough people received the vaccine.

Alderman Warke stated that he welcomed that an all-Ireland approach had not be taken towards the pandemic. He stated that before Christmas the South of Ireland went from having one of the lowest infection rates in Europe to now being the highest in the world. He felt that this was because they had almost returned to normal before the Christmas period with the opening of shops and the hospitality sector. He stated that Northern Ireland had taken the correct decision to remain closed. He stated that unfortunately the infection was currently high in the Council area, but welcomed the decrease in recent days and hoped that the figures in the South would decrease much quicker than they currently are. He concurred with the comments made by Alderman Hussey that a British Isles approach would be more sensible and felt that a complete closure of the North/South border was needed to drive down the infection rate.

In response, Professor Staines stated that the Zero Covid Group and the independent Sage group worked together on a way forward. He believed that it made more sense for a UK based organisation to deal with the UK government and an organisation based on the island of Ireland to deal with jurisdictions on that island. He stated that with enormous amount of sharing of information, he agreed that it would make a great deal of sense and the group had placed these matters before the various governments involved.

He referred to the previous comments regarding vaccination and stated that from the evidence they had reported that unfortunately, at 60% infection rate, there was a possibility of further major outbreaks of Covid-19. He stated that the suggestion from the virologists, with reason on their side, that 80% coverage was needed to stop the virus circulating. He hoped that this was true for both the existing strain and for the new UK strain and the new South African strain, however more information was needed. He stated that experience had shown that there was a small number of people who were anti-vaccine and could only be given the vaccine by force. He stated that there were many people who were vaccine hesitant as they needed reassurance that the vaccine was a reasonably safe option. He stated that conversations among people had helped to change people's thinking regarding vaccines. He felt that most people were actually vaccine hesitant rather than completely anti-vaccine.

In addition, Professor Dolk referred to comments made regarding a British Isles approach. She stated that the preferred position of the group was that the UK and Ireland adopted a zero Covid type

elimination strategy. She stated that Independent SAGE had also argued for the strategy as well as many others throughout England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. She believed that it was currently unlikely that England would adopt the zero Covid strategy. However, with the new variant currently present in the UK, the situation had changed as the new variant came about due to virus levels being allowed to remain high. She stated that discussions taking place within UK government regarding testing all new arrivals and the requirement for negative tests, was in response to the new variant and in line with the Covid elimination policy.

Continuing, in response to a query by Alderman Hussey, she advised that a paper outlining the strategy had been sent to every MLA and the group had also attempted to contact the Minister for Health. She advised that the Health Committee at the Assembly had shown an interest and were contacted firstly by Independent SAGE and endorsed the policy and it was her understanding that the Committee had written to the Minister for Health, however no response had been received. She stated that it was important to note, that in a pandemic situation, one could have arguments and differences of opinion on strategy, but did not doubt the hard work and good faith that has gone into managing this pandemic by the Minister for Health, the Health Service and many others. She felt that whilst there were differences on the overall strategy and goal, it was important to discuss this without taking away from the successes. She stated that the roll-out of the vaccine campaign was one of those successes, in terms of pandemic management.

Continuing, she stated that in terms of how to deal with apathy and complacency, it was a difficult issue as it had gone on for so long. She felt that if people could not see any end to the pandemic, they could be difficult to turn around. She stated that having a clear goal of what could be achieved was important. She believed that there had not been a goal, clear strategy or direction, other than trying not to overstep the capacity of the hospitals. She stated that moving to zero Covid was a clear goal that people could sign up to and the economy could then re-open but it was not a simple problem. She referred to the increased take up of the flu vaccine and stated that this was a baseline expectation of how the take up of the Covid vaccine would be and there was probably a higher motivation to receive it. She stated that everyone had a responsibility to engage in the conversations regarding the vaccine, but there was a group of anti-vaccine campaigners that could not be convinced. However, it was the larger

group of hesitant people that must be considered as they were open to hearing about the facts.

Councillor Harkin thanked Professors Staines and Dolk for clarifying the situation, particularly in relation to a Covid strategy in the UK. He stated that people were campaigning for that objective. He expressed dismay at the contribution from the DUP which he believed, called for the border between North and South to be imposed to prevent the infection rate from the South coming to the North. He noted that people from the area lived in a border county and consideration should be given on how that would disrupt people's lives. He stated that there were health workers in Altnagelvin Hospital who lived in Donegal who could be prevented from going to work. He described the comments as ignorant and unbelievable and that they partly explained how the current situation existed. He stated that it was clear from the presentation, that the Zero Covid Group had worked in proposing to both the coalition government and the Stormont Executive, that they gave serious consideration to the strategy. He stated that it was important that Council sends a clear message on the urgency to develop an all-Ireland response. He noted that a memorandum of understanding was in place which called for an integrated approach from the health service and governments on both sides of the border and this would build on that given the current situation.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their presentation and appreciated them taking the time to present to the Committee.

Councillor Harkin proposed, Seconded by Councillor R Barr

**Council calls for Stormont Executive and the Dáil Coalition Government to urgently implement an all-island Zero Covid strategy to eliminate community transmission of the virus in order to protect lives, health services and to bring a return to normality.**

Alderman Devenney asked on a point of clarity, if Council had previously dealt with a similar proposal. He referred to the comments made by Councillor Harkin and advised that the DUP would not be taking any lectures from him. He stated that Members had to make decisions on difficult issues. He queried comments on current infection rates in this Council area, compared to the Republic of Ireland which had the highest infection rate in the world. He asked Councillor Harkin for an explanation on that matter. He advised that the DUP would be abstaining from the vote on the proposal.

Councillor Duffy suggested that Alderman Devenney should be more measured in his comments in terms of infection rates. She noted that the rates had previously fluctuated between the North and South of Ireland. In terms of the proposal, she stated that Sinn Féin had always called for an all-Ireland approach. She commended New Zealand on how they have managed Covid-19. Unfortunately, Northern Ireland had a five party coalition government and it was not easy, particularly when other parties used cross-community vetoes to prevent health papers being brought forward. She asked if Councillor Harkin could agree to a minor amendment to the wording of the proposal. Councillor Harkin agreed to the amendment.

**Council calls for Stormont Executive and the Dáil Coalition Government to urgently consider an all-island Zero Covid strategy to eliminate community transmission of the virus in order to protect lives, health services and to bring a return to normality.**

Councillor Gallagher stated that as the rates are high, it may be useful to check how many people came from Derry airport and travelled to Dublin transmitting the virus along the way.

Alderman Warke proposed an amendment, Seconded by Alderman Devenney

**Council calls for Stormont Executive, Dáil, Welsh, Scottish and English Coalition Governments to urgently consider an all-island Zero Covid strategy to eliminate community transmission of the virus in order to protect lives, health services and to bring a return to normality.**

Councillor Harkin stated that earlier in the meeting, Alderman Warke had called for the border close between North and South. However, now he called for an all-island Covid elimination strategy. He asked if the DUP actually supported a zero Covid strategy for the island of Ireland and for Great Britain. He stated that the matter had to be taken seriously as people were in hospital, the health service was overwhelmed and asked them to reflect on that. He asked if Alderman Warke would argue with the Conservative Government to implement the strategy.

Alderman Warke stated that he had agreed with the comments made by Alderman Hussey on the matter and also on the border closing,

particularly with the high infection rate in the Republic of Ireland. He felt that all countries within the UK and Ireland should work together to combat Covid-19.

Members were then asked vote on the proposal, the result of which was as follows:

For:-13; Against:-1; Abstentions:-0.

The Committee

**Recommended**      **That Council calls for Stormont Executive, Dáil, Welsh, Scottish and English Coalition Governments to urgently consider an all-island Zero Covid strategy to eliminate community transmission of the virus in order to protect lives, health services and to bring a return to normality.**

### **Chairperson's Business**

#### **HC6/21      Recent Punishment Shootings**

The Chair referred to the two recent barbaric punishment shootings in the City which he described as appalling. He stated that the attacks achieved nothing but spread fear in the community, particularly at a time when Altnagelvin Hospital staff are severely under pressure, due to Covid-19.

Councillor Donnelly noted that the Chair did not take the opportunity to mention the attack in the Waterside area when nine shots were fired at a house.

The Chair advised Councillor Donnelly that at his first meeting as Chairperson of the Health and Community Committee, he had expressed his condemnation of that particular incident.

Councillor Donnelly stated that he wished to take this opportunity to raise the recent behaviour of the PSNI. He stated that there had been two recent, unacceptable incidents by the PSNI on working class residents of both Nationalist and the Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist, (PUL) communities. He reported that one incident had taken place at a supermarket in the Waterside area with a further incident of

harassment on a citizen who had his vehicle stopped and searched in the City side. He stated that these incidents were clearly a case of working class people being abused by the extra powers that the political parties have bestowed on the police force. He stated that if the Chair was to be consistent when expressing condemnation, people needed to speak out about these incidents.

The Chair advised that he did not refer to the matter regarding the incident at a local supermarket as the matter was still ongoing and no charges have yet to be brought forward. In terms of the second incident, he was not aware that it had occurred.

Councillor Doyle stated that he was aware of both incidents that had recently taken place. He advised that following meetings that he had with the PSNI Neighbourhood Officer, he was informed that any issues regarding the PSNI, should be communicated directly to a specific police officer. He stated that he had reported a number of issues to the designated officer, specifically on the recent incident at a local supermarket. However, he had received no response. He stated that after having watched the video on social media, he had no doubt that the gentleman in question was assaulted by a police officer. He described the methodology of the PSNI as ridiculous, as they effectively sought to manhandle members of the public before asking questions. He felt that it was the responsibility of their leadership to ensure that an example was set.

Councillor Harkin referred to the remarks made by Councillor Donnelly and stated that the issue of policing throughout the Covid crisis was very worrying. He stated that due to the police being given increased powers, this had resulted in an increase in reports by members of the public of harassment. He referred to the Police Ombudsman's report on the Black Lives Matter protests held on 6 June 2020, where those who attended the protests had now been vindicated. He reminded Members that some Elected Representatives had at that time asked that the full weight of the law to be brought down on those protesters and organisers. He stated that the videos on social media of people being harassed by the PSNI was cause for concern as he did not feel that there would be a law and order solution towards those breaching the pandemic regulations.

The Chair stated that he wished to extend his thanks and appreciation to the staff of the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHST) who answered the emergency call last weekend by the South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen and Craigavon Area Hospital who were under severe pressure. He commended the off duty staff who returned to duty to assist bringing the emergency under control.

**HC8/21 Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service**

The Chair welcomed the announcement by the Minister of Health regarding funding for the new Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service. He stated that the service would cost approximately £4.7m per annum and was extremely welcomed by campaigners who had been lobbying for several years on the matter.

**HC9/21 Queen's New Year Honours List**

The Chair extended his congratulations to the recent recipients of the Queen's New Year's Honour List to Mr William McElhinney, Principal of Ashlea Primary School, for services to primary education in Northern Ireland; Mrs Margaret Campbell, for services to pipe bands and Sollus Highland Dancers; Mr Alan Moore, for services to mass incident emergency planning in Northern Ireland and Mr Milton Porter, for services to cancer research and the community in Castleberg, County Tyrone.

**HC10/21 Community Support Service Funding**

The Chair advised that Councillor Duffy wished to raise a matter regarding the third tranche of Department for Communities (DfC) funding towards the Community Support Service and suggested that the item be discussed under confidential business.

Councillor Duffy queried the rationale behind the suggestion to discuss the matter in confidential business.

The Chair advised that the matter may be better suited to be discussed in confidential business due to the financial aspects and also that there was no report available. However, if she wished to discuss the matter in open business he was content for her to proceed.

Councillor Duffy stated that she wished to raise the matter under Chairperson's Business.

Councillor Duffy stated that she appreciated the Chair allowing her the opportunity to raise this matter. She stated that whilst she was aware that financial matters would be discussed, unfortunately she and other Elected Representatives had been contacted by community support hubs regarding the Warm, Well and Connected Programme. She stated that the funding for the first and second tranches to the programme had resulted in it being oversubscribed. She noted that the Outer North Area Partnership were using their own money in an attempt to sustain the programme, due to the increased hardship during the month of January. She stated that January was already a difficult month for many people but had increased with Covid, furloughed staff, job losses, children being at home and increased pressure within households. She advised that requests for fuel was a significant issue over the past number of weeks and that a number of the neighbourhood partnerships were currently running at a loss due to providing people with fuel. She noted that a report on the funding would be presented at a future Committee meeting. However, the urgency of the matter meant that it had to proceed rather than waiting until February or the beginning of March to have the report ratified by full Council. She stressed the importance of the funding being immediately allocated to those partnerships to allow the community support hubs to continue their vital work.

Continuing, she stated that community workers hoped that by February, the need for their services would be lessened. In terms of the additional funding, she asked how much was available as she was aware that a recent announcement had been made by the Department for Communities (DfC) towards funding for community support and also connectivity funding from Council. She stated that if money was now available, she proposed that it is directed to the community support hubs as a matter of urgency. She stressed the urgency for the immediate allocation of funding as there were elderly people and children who were without heating in their homes.

The Director of Health and Community advised that Officers had given a verbal indication just prior to Christmas that further funding would be received. She stated that it was estimated, based on previous allocations from tranche 1 and tranche 2 of £280,000, that this would be a similar amount. She stated however, that they had been advised that it would be a more significant amount of approximately £440,000. She advised that Officers had been working on proposals across the three criteria themes of food, income and connectivity and continued

to do so. She advised that a meeting scheduled for the following day with Council's audit, procurement and legal teams, with a view that a report would be presented at full Council on 28 January. She stated that she was unaware of today's announcement, therefore did not know what further funding was proposed but certainly would follow up on the matter. She noted that Officers would discuss the implications of the Warm, Well and Connected programme with DfC and stated an update would be provided to Members on the relevant issues and what the likelihood was of further allocations becoming available.

Councillor R Barr concurred with the sentiments expressed by Councillor Duffy. He stated that as a volunteer with Strabane Community Project, he had witnessed a dramatic increase in demand for services over the past few days. He stated that the need had increased in relation to food and fuel poverty. He stated that he had been involved with the community project since March 2020 and had not seen such an escalation in demand such as he now witnessed. He stated that as expected, mental health had also become a major issue with isolation, fear and health worries as well as worries regarding food and fuel poverty. This has exacerbated the problems that were being experienced prior to the coronavirus pandemic. He stated that the community project in Strabane had been instrumental in delivering meals on wheels, the good morning call and a social supermarket as well as being the main delivery partner in the Access to Food Programme funded by DfC and administered by Council. He expressed concern that staff in Strabane and other districts did not have the additional resources needed to cope with the extra demand.

Councillor Duffy Proposed, Seconded by Councillor R Barr

**That the additional funding from DfC go directly to community support hubs for food and fuel, with the original money continuing towards connectivity.**

Councillor Harkin stated that he had been contacted by organisations who reported having to shut their doors as they no longer had vouchers for fuel, electricity and food. He stated that this was a worrying situation and that everything should be done to ensure that those in need received help. He stated that there was a £2m underspend by the DfC for the Covid-19 Discretionary Support Scheme, which he described as alarming. He did not understand how this could happen, given the current situation. He stated that Council had requested on numerous occasions for the Executive to fund the

Hardship fund and that linking this to the £2m underspend for the Covid-19 Discretionary Support Scheme was concerning. He stated that this Council area was now in a situation, as predicted, that there would be far greater need.

Alderman Devenney concurred that Council should do everything possible during this difficult situation. He asked the Director for clarity regarding procurement. He then referred to the underspend in the Hardship Fund with St Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army, and asked how the underspend would be used.

In response, the Director of Health and Community advised that procurement and detailed governance issues would be discussed with relevant Officers at the meeting tomorrow regarding DfC's additional funding. In terms of the Hardship Fund, it had been agreed that a further report to the Welfare Reform working group would be presented in the New Year, outlining options and proposals in relation to the implementation of stage two of the Hardship Fund. She stated that it was her understanding, that a meeting was scheduled to take place on 2 February 2021 to accommodate the Voluntary Trust. However, this could be rescheduled to take place at an earlier date and advised that she would contact the Director of Legacy to convene that meeting early next week. She advised that conversations had taken place with partner organisations, however these would be formalised at the meeting of the working group next week.

Councillor Donnelly stated that it was obvious there was a significant need and demand within local communities, particularly those who were currently disadvantaged. He stated that there were issues with the procedures currently in place and had spoken to a number of people who had been ringing numbers for days and had not been able to get through. He reported that he had also spoken to two people recently, who eventually when they did get through, were told that it could take a further week to process their referral. He had spoken to Council officers on the matter and hoped that some of the issues raised would be addressed.

Councillor Ferguson stated that she supported the proposal. She stated that residents throughout the rural areas were experiencing similar issues. She stated that the community hubs in the area had to go out of pocket to purchase a second phone due to the significant increase in calls from people requesting help with fuel.

Councillor Farrell stated that if there was funding available, it should be allocated to those in need. He asked that in terms of the funding, it was his understanding that there was £300,000 allocated for connectivity, with a further £140,000 for food and fuel. He asked if this £140,000 would go directly to community support hubs. He advised that the Mayor had recently engaged with those community hubs and that a clear need for support was identified. He referred to the £200 Covid-19 heating payment, allocated to those in receipt of Pension Credit, Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment at the higher or enhanced rate. He noted that it has yet to be issued and there was a target date for the end of January for that support. He believed that if those £200 payments were allocated earlier it could reduce the burden on the community support hubs.

Councillor Farrell Proposed an Amendment, Seconded by Councillor Reilly

**That the additional funding from DfC go directly to community support hubs for food and fuel, with the original money continuing towards connectivity. Council calls for the immediate release of the Covid Heating Payment.**

The Director of Health and Community advised that in regard to the Covid heating payments, during the course of the meeting, she received an update from DfC in relation to the schemes of support and timelines which has been updated on the NI Direct website. She advised that she would forward Members the update once she had read it in detail as it may answer Members' queries raised around wider programmes and timelines. With regard to the discussions, she advised and she was not in attendance at yesterday's consultation meeting. However, she would receive a report from officials on the meeting the following day. She stated that support teams in legal and procurement and audit would be in attendance to discuss what level of consultation had taken place, how much the money was exceeded by and what was anticipated that Council would receive. Therefore, there was a level of discretion in terms of how the remainder of that funding would be spent. She stated that she would take Members' views and considerations as part of that determination.

Councillor Gallagher stated that as a Committee non-Member, he requested that the Committee consider adding to the proposal that Council provide a resilience plan as part of that package. He expressed

concern that some programmes would come to an abrupt end which would leave communities disadvantaged due to no resilience package being in place. He stated that this was important to ensure that everyone in need, affected by the pandemic, could access help.

Councillor Duffy stated that whilst she appreciated and concurred with the sentiments expressed by Councillor Gallagher, she felt that the request for Council to provide a resilience plan should be presented as a notice of motion at full Council.

Councillor Burke referred to comments made by previous speakers regarding problems with telephone lines and queries being answered. She stated that whilst working with the community in the Moor DEA, particularly over the past 10 days they have been inundated with referrals. She stated that there were also issues highlighted regarding money becoming available. She asked that Officers take this into consideration going forward.

Alderman Hussey welcomed the proposal and had no doubt that when presented at full Council it would achieve the full support of Members. He stated that it highlighted the fact that the communities needed immediate help. He asked if there was any indication why the Department for the Economy would be considering the delay in the issue of the £200 household vouchers, released by the Department of Finance, for families to use in their local shops.

Members were asked to vote on the Proposal, the result of which was unanimous.

The Committee

**Recommended**      **That (i) the additional funding from DfC go directly to community support hubs for food and fuel, with the original money continuing towards connectivity and (ii) Council calls for the immediate release of the Covid Heating Payment.**

**HC11/21      Condolences**

Councillor R Barr expressed condolences to the family of the late Mrs Marion O'Neill and paid tribute to the statutory and non-statutory groups from both sides of the border and local volunteers who took part on the search for Mrs O'Neill.

He also expressed condolences to the family of the former Chair of Strabane District Council, Mr James O’Kane. He stated that Mr O’Kane was a Councillor in the Strabane area for over 32 years and was hugely popular and respected and had worked tirelessly for the people of Strabane in his role as an Independent Elected Representative.

Councillor Edwards also expressed his condolences to the families of Mrs O’Neill and Mr O’Kane on their recent bereavements.

**HC12/21 Park Road, and Strabane Canal**

Councillor R Barr stated that the new walkway at the Canal in Strabane had been welcomed by the residents of Strabane who frequently used the area for walking during the lockdown. However, he felt that the project has become a victim of its own success with the age old problem of dog fouling and irresponsible dog owners. He felt that it was time for Council to adopt a zero tolerance approach to this problem. He stated that due to the popularity of the canal, car parking had also become a major problem and assumed that Council owned the car park. He asked that if so, was there a possibility that the car park could be expanded in the future to cope with the increased demand.

Continuing, he highlighted an issue regarding speeding on Park Road and asked that officers contact the relevant department with a view to imposing a speed limit or installing speed ramps at the area.

In response, the Director of Health and Community advised that she would refer the issues relating to the car park at the canal and traffic calming measures at Park Road to the Environment and Regeneration Directorate.

**HC13/21 Dog Control**

In response to the issues raised regarding dog fouling and dog control, the Head of Health and Community Wellbeing stated that an increased number of complaints had been reported and that recently an internal meeting was held with a number of different departments where it was agreed to authorise more Council staff to take action in relation to irresponsible dog ownership. He stated that Members would be aware that Council have introduced more dog control orders and that

messaging would also be reinforced with an increase in the patrols across the city and district.

Councillor Edwards stated that he had raised the issue of dog fouling at a recent meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Committee and had been advised to raise it at this Committee. He stated that dog fouling was a major issue throughout the Sperrin and Derg DEAs and he had received a commitment from street cleansing that they would clean up the dog fouling in those areas. He expressed concern regarding the lack of enforcement and felt that more action needed to be taken. He stated during his 8 months as an Elected Representative, he had yet to see a dog warden in his DEA and would like to see more visibility of enforcement in both the Sperrin and Derg DEAs. He stated that it was time for Council to do more and whilst he realised the pandemic has probably exacerbated the problem with more people out walking, the dog warden and enforcement officers had to be seen out and about in those areas.

Councillor Ferguson stated that she had also been contacted regarding dog fouling issues throughout the rural areas and that one person in particular had a child fall on dog foul at Lougheramore Forest. She advised that the ranger said that it was the responsibility of Council to supply dog bins in that area and she asked the Head of Health and Community Wellbeing to consider placing more bins in rural forestry areas to make them available to people enjoying our nature.

Councillor Mooney stated that he supported the comments made by the previous speakers. He stated that he had also been contacted by constituents regarding the same issue, particularly from residents of the Seven Oaks area of the Waterside. He stated that he had contacted street cleansing on the matter. He understood that due to the restrictions that more people remained at home and needed to get outdoors, however irresponsible dog owners must be urged to clean up after their pets.

Alderman Devenney stated that he had raised the issue of dog control on many occasions and agreed that dog fouling was a major issue and with the increased volume of dog walkers throughout the city and district and he welcomed the increase in dog control officers.

Councillor Gallagher stated that dog fouling had been an ongoing issue going back several years. He stated that the pandemic has increased the problem and Strabane town was particularly bad with dog fouling.

He stated that more action needed to be taken by Council. He believed that dog wardens could not solve this problem and that more signs should be erected with temporary CCTV put in operation across the hotspots in Strabane. He stated that this would be a temporary solution and suggested that Council fully investigate a long term solution. He advised that he had previously raised at Council, the potential of the DNA project to tackle dog fouling. He felt that this would eradicate the problem. He believed that Council should investigate this approach and compile a business case as it had proved successful in other council areas.

Alderman Warke concurred with the sentiments expressed by Councillor Gallagher on the matter. He stated that all Members were receiving calls daily on the matter. He asked if Council could make a no dog zone area in certain areas, particularly beside play facilities.

In response, the Head of Health and Community Wellbeing advised that Council had a dog exclusion order that related to play areas, therefore dogs should not be in those areas and would follow up on the matter.

The Chair stated that he concurred with all of the comments made by the previous speakers on the matter. He stated that calls from the public had increased tenfold since the lockdown period and there were inconsiderate dog owners who did not care. He felt that once people were aware that fines had been issued, they may become more cautious. He said that there was also a recurring dog control issue at a park in the Drumahoe area where people were letting dogs run off leash and that some had attacked other dogs that were on leads.

Councillor R Barr Proposed, Seconded by Councillor Edwards

**That Council adopt a zero tolerance policy in relation to dog fouling and dog control.**

Councillor Edwards stated that whilst looking at the statistics for dog fouling in the Council area over the last three years and noticed that Derry and Strabane had issued 6 fines up to 2020 while Ards and North Down Borough Council had issued 475. He stated that Council needed to take the issue more seriously.

Members were asked to vote on the Proposal, the result of which was unanimous.

The Committee

**Recommended**      **That this Council reassign furloughed and casual staff to the role of dog wardens, that can be distributing poo bags, provide information leaflets, as well as providing a physical presence on the ground particularly in hotspots.**

**That Council also agrees to look at additional actions to tackle dog fouling across the district including the use of DNA testing and CCTV.**

**HC14/21      Employers and the Minimum Wage**

Alderman Devenney referred to a recent report by the HMRC that had listed employers for not paying the minimum wage to their staff. He stated it was disgraceful when taking into account that over 1,000 employees were affected. He welcomed that the HMRC had clearly issued a message to all employers that the minimum wage was not optional, it was law and commended them for taking the initiative on the matter. He hoped that the report would send a message that any employer not paying the minimum wage would be scrutinised and brought to task.

**HC15/21      Air Ambulance Service**

Alderman Devenney referred to a deputation to Committee by the Air Ambulance Service, where it had been agreed that officers would look at the possibility of contributing £10,000 per annum to the service over a three-year period. He felt that it was important to bring attention to the matter, particularly with the forthcoming rates review process. He stated that Air Ambulance was a charitable organisation that was saving lives across Northern Ireland and in particular within this Council area. He asked that the matter be considered again within the Rates Review.

**HC16/21      Matters Arising from the Open Minutes of the Health and Community Committee held on Thursday 10 December 2020.**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 December 2020 (HC212/20 –HC238/20) were confirmed and signed by the Chairperson.

### **Matters Arising from the Minutes**

#### **HC17/21 Deputation: To receive Mr Joe McCusker, UNISON, re: Council Motion on Healthcare Workers Pay (HC216/20)**

Councillor Harkin referred to the recent deputation to the Committee from Unison. He stated that a recommendation had been endorsed to write to Westminster and the Stormont Executive in support of the pay award for healthcare staff and all Westminster representatives from here to urge them to support the healthcare workers campaign for a pay increase. He requested an update on those actions and if any responses had been received.

In response the Director of Health and Community confirmed that correspondence was issued as requested. She advised that in recent days some responses had been received but not in time to be included on the agenda. Members would be provided with an update on formal responses received.

#### **HC18/21 Employees within the Hospitality Sector (HC222/20) – Taxi Drivers**

Councillor Harkin referred to the discussion by the Committee regarding taxi drivers that have been experiencing poverty due to the pandemic and the failure of Stormont to put financial relief schemes in place. He stated that he was aware of another discussion pending at the Executive on how to assist taxi drivers. He stated that the Committee had agreed to contact a number of ministers on the matter and asked if any responses had been received.

In response, the Director of Health and Community advised that correspondence on the matter has been issued and Members will be updated accordingly on any responses received.

The Chair advised that the Minister had just announced a change in the financial packages for taxi drivers. He stated that they could apply to a second scheme. He stated that the drivers who had lost out over payment holidays, or had not applied the first time, would now be permitted to apply. He advised that on the basis of an award of £3,000, there would be 30 day increments with payment holidays and for each 30 days, the driver will lose £250.00.

**HC19/21 Additional NI Executive Funding for Food Support (HC235/20) – UNISON (School Meals Service)**

Alderman Hussey asked if any response had been received from UNISON regarding the concerns raised in relation to the school meals service.

In response, the Director of Health and Community advised that no response had been received to date.

Councillor Harkin thanked Alderman Hussey for raising the matter. He advised that there was currently a campaign in the North for universal free school meals which would not be based on household income. He stated that awareness and information about the campaign would be available soon and hoped that it would be broadly supported.

Alderman Hussey thanked Councillor Harkin for his input and that the campaign for universal free school meals would be welcomed. There was a responsibility that when a child comes to school to ensure that they have a good meal.

**HC20/21 Mobile Phone Connectivity (H224/20)**

Councillor Edwards referred to ongoing issues regarding mobile phone connectivity, particularly in the Castletown area. He stated that the situation had worsened and asked if any response had been received on the matter.

The Director of Health and Community advised that the matter had been passed to the Head of Business who deals with mobile connectivity issues and that a request would be made for him to provide Members with an update on the matter.

**HC21/21 Electromagnetic Fields from 5G Base Stations (HC223/20)**

Councillor Farrell referred to the above item and requested an update on the matter.

In response, the Head of Health and Community Wellbeing advised that an order had been raised in relation to carry out testing on the mast at Strand Road at the cost of £1,000 to Council. He further advised that a school in the Glengalliagh Road area had contacted OFCOM to carry

out an assessment of the Glengallagh Road mast. He noted that none of the audit reports were received to date, but once received, Members will be updated accordingly.

## **HC22/21     Draft Mental Health Strategy 2021 – 2031 Consultation Document**

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' views on the Department of Health's Draft Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 Consultation Document.

Councillor Doyle advised that he had submitted a notice of motion for the January meeting of full Council regarding the mental health strategy. He was aware that within the recommendations, that Members' views would be collated. He advised that part of his motion was to bring all parties and independent members together to look in depth at what specifically this strategy would mean for the city and district. He believed that the strategy was one of the most important documents to be produced recently and that significant areas with mental health provision required attention.

Councillor Farrell stated that the SDLP were of the opinion that the document was a very honest assessment on the state of our mental health services across the North. Unfortunately, it painted a sorry picture of the existing provision. However, he felt that there were ambitious plans to address the failings. He stated that his Party was in broad agreement with the actions outlined, but the real test would be about delivery of the strategy. He stated that previously there had been numerous strategies and action plans that had amounted to nothing due to not being given political priority, adequate resources or funding. He noted that the North had the highest rate of mental health problems in the UK with the lowest rate of funding. He stated that there were lengthy waiting lists in the Western Trust area as demand had outstripped supply. In addition, not training enough social workers or mental health nursing staff or clinical psychologists had resulted in significant vacancies. With regard to waiting lists, he stated that the Trust was transparent on such matters and the data and statistics were clearly illustrated on their website regarding mental health waiting lists. However, whilst attempting to find comparable data with other trusts, this had proven difficult.

Continuing, he stated that he welcomed the commitment within the strategy regarding regional oversight and performance monitoring. He

also welcomed the commitment for a regional crisis service, therefore there would no longer be a constant funding battle to sustain our own local crisis intervention service. However, he felt that the real test would be in its' success. He noted that only 40% of people with mental health problems in the North were able to access effective health care. Also, 80% of people who sought treatment felt that the service that they had received was not what they needed. He noted that at the November meeting of full Council, he raised the issue of mental health waiting lists and that one person in the WHSCT area was waiting 171 weeks to access psychological therapies. He reported that more recent data had reported that they were still waiting, for over three and a half years. He stated that the test of the strategy would be if people could access services in a timely manner and when they do access those services, would it be the right service that would make an actual difference to their lives.

Councillor Burke stated that Sinn Féin welcomed the progress in producing an effective mental health strategy and commended the work carried out within the draft document. She stated that everyone was aware of the serious threat and issues regarding mental health and as the previous speaker had mentioned, the matter has been discussed in the Chamber on numerous occasions. She stated that despite the tremendous efforts of workers within all areas of mental health, the service has been lacking and has been for a long time. She further stated that Council, was well aware of the need for a sustainable crisis support service.

Continuing, she stated that mental health issues had increased during the pandemic and subsequently increased what was already a highly sought after and demanded service. She felt that mental health was an issue that required immediate attention. She referred to the draft document and stated that the joint up approach to producing the document including the cross departmental and cross sectoral engagement and the public element of the consultation, would hopefully allow a full picture of the issues. She felt that it would also allow a broader, joint up discussion and approach of ideas and solution to tackling those issues. She stated that mental health has been neglected for too long and the draft strategy was an opportunity to shape a structured, practical and effective solution to both address and deal with the issues that have significantly impacted our communities. She advised that her Party would forward the response to the consultation in due time.

Councillor Ferguson stated that she was happy to forward her Party's comments to officers for the consultation. She welcomed the report and stated that it was much needed in a way of producing an action plan and strategy moving forward, particularly the regional crisis service. She asked what the deadline was for the submission of comments to the consultation document.

In response, the Head of Health and Community Wellbeing advised that responses had to be submitted by 26 March 2021. He stated that an ideal scenario would be to present a report to the February Committee meeting. However, it was unlikely that the timeframe for February reports submission would be met, therefore it was intended to have the responses collated by mid-February for Members' consideration at the March Committee meeting.

Alderman Devenney echoed the sentiments expressed by the previous speakers. He stated that his party welcomed the strategy and it had given a stark picture of mental health provision across Northern Ireland. He stated that it was important to deliver the service properly and that people were offered the correct service. He stated that whilst mental health referral numbers were high, there were people with mental health issues suffering in silence and it was important to get the message out to those people to come forward as there was help available.

Councillor Donnelly stated that a word often used when discussing mental health was crisis. He stated that he was in no doubt that there was a huge crisis throughout the city and district regarding mental health. He believed that he did not see a strategy working and had based this on dealing with people suffering from mental health issues on a daily basis. He stated that one person in particular had become homeless and had experienced great difficulty in receiving assistance, which he described as unacceptable. He stated that there was an onus on all political parties to get these issues addressed as they were spiralling out of control.

The Chair stated that traditionally, mental health provision was the poor relative of the NHS and continually underfunded. He hoped that the consultation document finally received the attention it deserved.

The Committee

**Recommended that Members (i) consider the Draft Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 Consultation Document and provide**

**views/comments and (ii) a draft response incorporating Members' views be prepared by Council officers for consideration at a future Health and Community Committee meeting prior to submission to the Department of Health by 26<sup>th</sup> March 2021.**

**HC23/21 Foyleside Community Resilience Fund Underspend to be Re-profiled to the Community Recovery Plan**

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 to re-profile the under spend of £7,061.75 from the Foyleside Community Resilience plan into the Community Recovery Plan for the Foyleside DEA.

Councillor Logue endorsed the recommendation within the report. She stated that those groups were aware of where the funding is best spent and it should not be lost by any DEA.

The Committee

**Recommended That Members approve the re-profiling of £7,061.75 of the Community Resilience underspend into the Foyleside Community Recover Plan as outlined within the report.**

**HC24/21 Playing Pitches Strategy Options**

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 options for approval to deliver on the strategic recommendations from the Playing Pitches Strategy and to seek Members' approval of the draft priority scoring matrix to be used for all projects under any preferred options.

Alderman Hussey stated that the report had identified a pitch deficit in Strabane Town and Strabane rural which was significant compared to Derry City, Derry Rural. He expressed concern that the proposals did not include any new pitch development. He stated that the report also

clearly illustrated that this Council area did not have a surplus supply comparative with other councils. He referred to the strategic recommendation and welcomed that the strategic involvement included sports clubs. He expressed his disappointment that the deficit noted in the report also corresponded to play park provision and that there was no budget available to deal with that issue. He stated that he would be giving this his full consideration during the rates process as it needed to be addressed. He stated that the deficits in pitch and play facilities within the wider rural areas had been clearly identified within the strategy. He stated that whilst he welcomed a lot of the good work and points within the strategy, those issues had to be dealt with.

Councillor McHugh endorsed the comments raised by the previous speaker. He stated that the draft playing pitch strategy had been presented at numerous Committee meetings and felt it was now time to endorse the recommendations within the report. He stated that the deficit of playing pitches identified within the report had a knock on effect in terms of existing clubs being hampered from further development. However, he welcomed the report and looked forward to contributing to its implementation.

Councillor Mooney also endorsed the recommendation within the report and looked forward to the receipt of the full report in due course. He concurred with the comments made by the previous speakers and welcomed that Council had 143 pitches in stock around the city and district. However, but there were gaps as highlighted by the previous speakers which must be addressed.

Alderman Devenney welcomed the report and concurred that there were deficits and gaps that must be addressed as they could pose an issue for smaller sports clubs to grow and mature. He referred to the logo of 'protect, enhance, provide' and asked how could be achieved if there was no budget available. He stated that the matter needed to be considered for inclusion in the rates process.

In response, the Head of Community Development and Leisure referred to the rural Strabane area. He stated that in terms of deficits across a number of sports, these would be addressed. He advised that he and the Director of Health and Community had fully explored the matter over recent years in terms of possible funding from Sport NI or other bodies. However, with Covid-19, capital money was not forthcoming at present. He stated that the deficits highlighted would be the number one capital priority project. He noted that a previous report referred to

elements around developing facilities at Spamount to attempt to address the deficit, even though it was not going to achieve the strategic recommendations. He stated that there were complex issues such as getting the project started and putting a design team in place. He advised that until the actual costs had been identified it would be difficult as the first thing would be to secure funding for a design team.

The Committee

**Recommended that Members (i) approve preferred options to deliver on the strategic recommendations from the Playing Pitch Strategy and (ii) approve the draft Priority scoring matrix to be used for all projects under any preferred options.**

**HC25/21 Department of Justice Consultation on Enhancing Legal Protections for Victims of Domestic Abuse – Draft Response**

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 a draft response to the Department of Justice Consultation on Enhancing Legal Protections for Victims of Domestic Abuse.

Councillor Ferguson endorsed the recommendation within the report. She stated that the figures were stark for this city and district with 801 domestic abuse incidents reported and 407 crimes recorded between April and September 2020. She also noted that there was 1,616 recorded in a six-month period and stated that a lot needed to be done and welcomed that Council proposed to become one of the geographical locations that will pilot the scheme. She enquired if Council Officers, had been contacted by Nexus regarding trying to access rural areas, as an increase of domestic violence in rural areas was occurring but not reported. She stated that Mid and East Antrim Borough Council had introduced the 'Here to Help' app. She stated that the app enabled local people to quickly access contact details for a range of support services available to them in the borough. She asked if Officers would consider investigating how this app could be introduced to this Council area.

Councillor Mooney endorsed the recommendation within the report. He stated that the report was criminal justice centred as it dealt with

criminal justice and domestic violence and agreed with the proposals for the Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Orders.

Councillor Logue stated that she welcomed the consultation. She asked if Community Restorative Justice could be included in the answer to question 6 of the consultation. She stated that there were local groups within the DEAs who would deal with community safety, therefore she felt it would merit if they were included in the consultation. She suggested that head teachers also be included as there were often children in the midst of domestic violence and they would certainly witness the impact within schools. She further requested that La Dolce Vita project be included. She referred to questions 17, 32 and 21 and advised that she would forward her Party's comments in relation to those matters to the relevant Officer.

In response, the Head of Community Development and Leisure stated that he did not currently have the details and noted that officers would ensure that the team within PCSP reflected Members' views on the consultation.

Councillor Logue stated that she would compile a summary of her comments and would forward them to the appropriate officer for inclusion in the consultation response.

Alderman Devenney stated that the DUP supported the draft response to the consultation. He stated that it highlighted the high numbers of male or female victims of domestic abuse. He stated that the Covid situation had exacerbated the situation and he felt that numbers would increase.

The Chair stated that he wished to add his support to the consultation as he had some family members who had suffered from coercive abuse at the hands of a partner which was not nice to witness and left family members feeling helpless. He hoped that when this was taken forward it would protect victims from all types of domestic abuse.

The Committee

**Recommended that Members approve the draft response to the consultation with the inclusion of Members' further comments.**

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 outline for Members the options in respect of Brooke Park Bowling Pavilion and to update Members on further proposed consultation with the Bowling Club at Brooke Park and the governing body of sport for bowling.

Councillor Harkin thanked the Head of Community Development and Leisure and the officer team for the report. He stated that it reflected the previous discussions and the spirit and will coming from the bowling club members. He felt that the engagement included in the recommendation was significant and was important to involve the club members in those engagements. He also felt that it was important not just to engage with Councillors in Foyleside DEA, but across the entire district. He stated that people from across the district could benefit from and use the facility. He felt that given the previous discussions regarding physical and mental health and well-being, that bowling was an activity that people of all ages could participate in. He stated that the club members were eager to see the bowling green be used by everyone. He felt that this vision could be a transformative event in terms of the upgrade of the facility. He stated that the club wanted an expanded membership and he encouraged Members to consider joining.

Continuing, he referred to the issue of changing rooms at Brooke Park and stated that there was a possibility of cross-fertilisation of changing facilities as they could also be used for other activities. He stated that the parking issue at the area was ongoing and was a huge issue in that area already for workers and users at Brooke Park and residents of the area. He stated that club members had clearly indicated that they wanted a new build facility and it was important to continue to engage with them and do all we can to facilitate it.

Councillor Carr referred to the recommendation within the report that noted that a further meeting would be held with club members. He felt that the item should be deferred until that meeting had taken place.

The Chair stated that this was also his understanding of the matter.

Councillor Donnelly stated that the bowling club at Brooke Park was intergenerational and cross-community and had the social aspect. He concurred with the sentiments expressed by Councillor Harkin that the

invitation to meetings should be extended to any Elected Member who wished to attend.

Councillor Mooney concurred with the sentiments expressed by the previous speakers. He stated that it was his understanding that it had been agreed at the December meeting of Council that all Elected Representatives would be invited to participate in any discussions regarding the bowling club.

Councillor Gallagher thanked the Head of Community Development and Leisure for the report. He stated that this report was an update of the previous discussion and he felt that providing options and the recommendation to consult with the users was the sensible way forward. He also felt that any Elected Member should be welcome to attend.

The Director of Health and Community stated that she would check the minutes of the December Council meeting but if it was the wish of the Committee to involve and open the consultation to all Members, there would be no difficulty.

The Committee

**Recommended that Members (i) endorse the proposed consultation process with the Bowling Club at Brooke Park and also with the governing body of sport for bowling and (ii) Members note the proposed options as set out in the report, the details of which will be re-presented for approval following the consultation process.**

### **Open for Information**

#### **HC27/21 NI Executive Support Programmes: Warm, Well and Connected and the Volunteering Programme Update**

The Head of Community Development and Leisure presented the above report, details of which were previously circulated to Members. The purpose of the report was to update Members with further details on the Warm, Well and Connected programme, the Volunteering programme and the Meals and Wheels programme, which was approved by Members at Full Council in December 2020.

Alderman Hussey referred to section 3.4 of the report and stated that it was his understanding that there were some initial issues and asked if they had been resolved.

In response, the Head of Community Development and Leisure stated that there were some resources issues and they had subsequently been resolved.

The Committee

**Recommended**      **that Members note the allocations to the Lead Organisations approved at Full Council on December 2020 in relation to Warm, Well and Connected programme; Volunteering programme and Meals and Wheels programme.**

**HC28/21      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.**

**HC29/21      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.**