

Health and Care Report to the Executive of the Joint Forum of Community Councils in West Lothian September 2021

Sadly for us all, the following summary is the last that can be generated based on Ian Buchanan's comprehensive monthly update. Ian is stepping down from his role as a Community Councillor and from many of the duties he has provided over recent years. This will be a substantial loss unless a replacement can be found from across West Lothian.

Key points are:

Analogue to Digital Telecare Transition.

Telecare has been provided in West Lothian since 1999 promoting independence at home and offering individuals reassurance of being able to summon help if needed. The Home Safety Service currently provides telecare equipment in over 3700 homes. The emergency alerts are transmitted to Careline via the service user's analogue telephone line, which by 2025 will no longer be supported by telecom providers.

In addition to the service user's personal pendant, to press in the event of requiring assistance, a range of additional sensors can be provided depending on need. These can detect issues such as fire, carbon monoxide, falls, periods of non-movement, exiting the property during the night or if a service user does not return to bed or has a seizure.

The transition to digital has 3 elements: the upgrade to the Alarm Receiving Platform (scheduled to become operational last month), the hubs within people's homes and the devices staff use to install, maintain and program the alarm hubs. Capital funds of £850,000 have been allocated for the transition to digital.

Senior Health Appointments.

Professor Alison Strath has been confirmed as the Scottish Government's Chief Pharmaceutical Officer. She has been working within the Scottish Government since 2002, is a Fellow of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and is an Emeritus Professor at Robert Gordon University.

Professors Graham Ellis and Nicola Steedman have been appointed Deputy Chief Medical Officers. Professor Ellis has been with the Scottish Government since 2019, recently as Senior Medical Officer for Ageing and Health. He is a member of the SAGE Social Care Working Group. Professor Steedman is an Honorary Consultant Physician in Sexual Health and HIV at the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh.

Future Pandemic Expert Group.

An expert group of leading scientists and medical specialists, set up to advise the Scottish Government on preparing for the threat of future pandemics, met for the first time on 19 August. The Standing Committee on Pandemics will be tasked with ensuring that the country is as prepared as possible for any future risks from novel pathogens.

Professor Linda Bauld of Edinburgh University chaired the meeting in an interim capacity while a permanent Chair is sought. The existing COVID-19 advisory group will continue to sit and advise on

the current pandemic. The new committee will focus on preparedness for other future emerging threats.

West Lothian Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Group update.

In August, Public Health Scotland and National Records Scotland released the Probable Suicides statistics for reporting year 2020. In Scotland there were 805 deaths, a decrease of 3% on the previous year. In West Lothian there were 23 deaths, the same number as the previous year. 6 were female, 17 were male. West Lothian has the 11th lowest suicide rate of the 32 local authority areas and is below the national average. Nationally, men aged 35-44 are highest risk. Age breakdown in local authority areas is not available.

West Lothian COVID-19 Dataset.

- Claimant count has decreased slightly to 4.7% and remains at a lower rate than both Scotland and the UK. Figures still suggest that the furlough scheme continues to insulate the labour market.
- Youth unemployment remains slightly higher than the Scottish average.
- There is uncertainty about the impact on the economy of the potential withdrawal of furlough and Self Employment Income Support. At the end of June, 5% of the West Lothian workforce were furloughed compared to 6% of the Scottish workforce.
- There is concern about the proposed withdrawal of increased Universal Credit payments on the most vulnerable citizens in West Lothian.
- The majority of West Lothian residents claims for COVID self-isolation support grants continue to be rejected, although the number of grant requests received is increasing.
- Scottish Welfare Fund made payments to 10,696 West Lothian people in 2020/21, up from 6,635 in 2019/20. The numbers continue to increase.
- From May 2020 to the end of June 2021, the West Lothian Food Network has provided a total of 1,706,460 meals through its 38 community provider groups. The “nature” of the need relating to food has changed. During lockdown the need arose as people could not access food, however now over 80% of those accessing the food network are financially at risk on low income, unemployed and eligible for free school meals. The Food Network has recently experienced challenges in obtaining food, particularly fresh produce. This is a reflection of what is happening across the whole of the system with distribution challenges across the country.
- Council housing rent continues a high collection rate at 98%. Council Tax collection has increased in the first 4 months of the year compared to the same months in 2020/21 and is also tracking higher than the same months in 2019/20.
- Since September last year the DWP has made a positive improvement in the way it pays Universal Credit to landlords. Money is now received faster as a constant daily stream instead of block payments. This is smoother with lower intra month peaks and troughs, and less customers are triggering the responsive arrears process.

Scottish Government Review of Adult Social Care.

The proposals are now much more extensive than what was proposed by Feeley. The National Care service is to include Children and Young People's services, all social work services and appropriate elements of Mental Health services. Further views are to be sought on whether Community Justice and Alcohol & Drug services are to be within the NCS. IJBs are to be revamped into Community Health and Social Care Boards (CHSCBs), to be the delivery arms of the NCS and responsible directly to Ministers.

Attached is a consultation document on the subject. Over a hundred pages and 86 questions! Responses are to be in by 02 November.

[A National Care Service for Scotland: consultation - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/consultations/nationalcare)

I met, at her request, with Fiona Hyslop MSP, face to face at her constituency office, on 30 August to discuss this subject. The meeting was cordial but not productive. I took the opportunity by the way to raise the subject of St. Michael's with her.

Anyway back to social care. She made it clear from the outset that she is no longer a Minister, is not on any committee dealing with the matter, and is just a backbencher.

She said that Jeane Freeman, the former Cabinet Secretary, accepted all 53 of the Feeley recommendations. It is going ahead.

When I spoke to her about workforce problems (see NHS Recovery Plan, below) she said these issues can be resolved through better pay and conditions, careers and training. I told her she sounded like Boris Johnson talking about lorry driver shortages.

She said there will be more money for social care. I said that was good news but she didn't need to reform social care structures to provide that.

Regarding the possibility of there being Super-IJBs she claimed the provision was merely to give Ministers the powers to create them, not necessarily to actually do that!

Procurement West Lothian.

The current provider of support for children affected by parental substance abuse is **Circle Scotland**, whose contract ends on 31 March 2022 with no further extension available. In 2020/21, 43 of the target 45 families were supported. There were good outcomes in the following 5 areas:

- Families living conditions are considered to be a safe environment.
- Parents/carers are able to recognise and meet their child's physical and emotional needs.
- Parents have increased control and involvement over their recovery journey.
- Families are more nurturing.
- Parents and children are involved in activities together and in the community.

Circle Scotland receive match funding of £26.773 from the CORRA Foundation towards an additional staff member. Also, along with Change Grow Lives Recovery Service, they have secured 50% funding for 3 years from September 2021-24 towards a full-time Fathers Support Worker post.

Additionally, collectively with the West Lothian Drug and Alcohol Partnership, they have submitted a note of interest for match funding through the National Drugs Mission Fund.

There is uncertainty on how the Scottish Government will roll out the Whole Family Approach National Strategy and associated funding at this time. It would be inappropriate to tender without full knowledge of the strategic landscape and associated funding. Council officers are recommending a direct award of a contract to Circle Scotland for a period of 3 years from April 2022 to March 2025, with an estimated total value of £383,544.

This is a summary and the full report from Ian is available on request.