



A message from our Chief Executive, Sandra Black

With another weekend fast approaching under lockdown, I am conscious of how difficult it can be to differentiate between days, balance home and work, and find things to do that help us to relax and switch-off.

All aspects of our lives are dominated by the current pandemic and constant news and information about the crisis. This in itself can create stress at a time when we can't take time out to do the things we love most, or to meet with family or friends.

I am also very aware of how hard it must be for colleagues who are having to self-isolate and cannot leave the house at all and for those living with, and supporting, someone who is Shielding. Please remember the council is here to help and to listen, to check in to make sure you are safe and well or connect you to a wide range of wellbeing support.

[Read Sandra's message in full here.](#)

Visit our website at
www.renfrewshire.gov.uk

Latest information and advice —we've got you covered!

Please continue to follow the latest Scottish Government guidance in relation to Coronavirus and stay home to save lives.

As of Monday 11 May, there has been one change made to the current restrictions in Scotland which means you can now exercise more than once per day, i.e. walk, run or cycle, but you must still adhere to the physical distancing guidance, stay close to home and stay two meters away from anyone not from your own household.

We continue to follow Scottish Government guidance and you can find the latest information you need on our website:
www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/coronavirus.



Paolo's 10 out of 10

Our local distribution teams received an unexpected gift this week from a local super fan, when Paisley's Paolo Nutini called to say he was 'bowled over by the council's work to help local families' and wanted to donate to their efforts.

The service, delivered by teams from E&I and volunteers across the council, has delivered over 100,000 meals to vulnerable and shielding families across Renfrewshire. Paolo's donation means even more financial support to make sure local people and families who are having to stay home have access to food and medicine.

Paolo also wanted to say a massive thank you to the Home Care teams at the Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership, who he thinks are amazing. Paolo's family experienced the kindness and care provided by the team first hand when they looked after his nanna, and his donation will also provide support to the teams at their touch down bases.



Help us get it right...

So much has changed in such a short time. Now, more than ever, our staff communications need to be the best they can be.

To help and support you in this new normal we want to make sure we're keeping you updated with what's happening at work, connecting you with colleagues, helping you take care of your wellbeing and creating new ways to keep in touch with you.

Could you take 5–10 minutes to answer a few short questions to help us get it right? <https://arcg.is/1Wyn08>

The survey will be available until Thursday 21 May. Thanks for taking part.

Don't forget you can follow us on Facebook @Renfrewshire and Twitter @RenCouncil for the latest staff updates or check out the staff section of our public website at www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/coronavirus-staff



Elaine Scott, Stephen McAllister, and Jen Sloan hold the Malawi flag at Park Mains Hub.

Classrooms for Malawi

Senior Facilities Manager Elaine Scott, UNITE Officer Stephen McAllister, and Jen Sloan, proprietor of The Cave in Paisley, have been part of the operation to prepare essential care packages at the Park Mains hub for the residents of Renfrewshire. But that's not all they have in common. The philanthropic trio have already signed up to go to Malawi next year as part of the 2021 Classrooms for Malawi project.

Every two years Renfrewshire Council staff work in partnership with Classrooms for Malawi in their mission to increase the provision of education, build and improve public facilities, support local teachers, provide first aid as well as anything else they can do to help local communities across the country. Elaine said, 'When the current pandemic passes, there will still be much to achieve, particularly in places like Malawi where even before this world crisis, many were going without even basic necessities. If you are interested in signing up for the 2021 trip or would like more information, please email me at elaine.scott@renfrewshire.gov.uk, or Stephen McAllister at stevieunite@hotmail.co.uk.'

Health, Safety and Wellbeing at work and at home

Our 'Health, Safety and Wellbeing at work' page is there to help whether you are on the front line or working from home. Here you can also find information on keeping safe at home and at work plus the first of a series of useful online learning guides under 'Working at home' which includes resources to support home and remote working, managing virtual teams, managing in a crisis situation, and dealing with stress. www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/article/10207/Health-and-Wellbeing-at-Work

Mental Health Awareness Week starts on Monday 18 May. Look out for the daily advice and tips from our Human Resources department who will be sharing information and links to other organisations who can provide support at this time. Topics will include; 'The importance of mental health', 'healthy body, healthy mind', 'identifying when you need

support', 'homeworking tips', 'healthy eating advice', 'Mindfulness', 'working out at home' and links to Renfrewshire Leisure resources including an interactive virtual walking challenge.

The Scottish Government has also put together a great package to help people keep body and mind healthy during this challenging time. For ideas on exercising, healthy diet, maintaining a social life and staying emotionally centred visit <https://clearyourhead.scot/>

Don't forget our employee counselling service is still available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Professional counsellors are on hand to provide you with free, confidential support via telephone and digital channels such as Skype. Visit the webpage www.timefortalking.co.uk/ for more information or call 0800 970 3980 for free support now.



Events Update

Last week brought news that all our planned major town centre events have sadly been cancelled up to the end of October due to the ongoing restrictions caused by the pandemic.

This means some of the biggest dates in Renfrewshire's calendar—including the Spree and Halloween festivals—will not go ahead this year. The other events being cancelled include Barshaw and Renfrew Gala Days, Johnstone Fire Engine Rally and Doors Open Day.

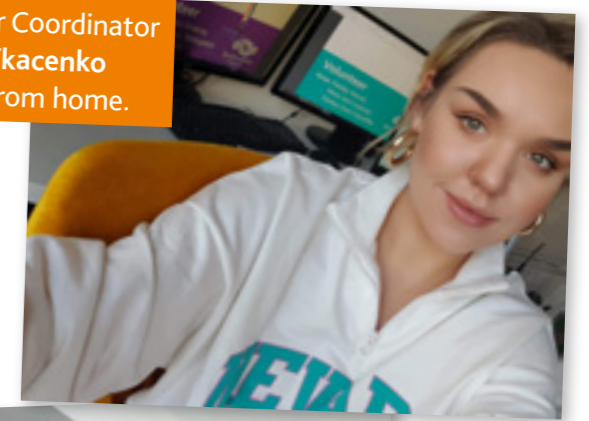
However, Paisley's Sma' Shot Day celebrations will still be marked, just in a different way—with an online programme of virtual events taking place on Saturday 4 July.

The winter events programme—including the annual fireworks display and Christmas Lights Switch-ons—remains in the calendar for now, but this will be reviewed in line with national guidance by the end of June.

Louisa Mahon, Head of Marketing, Communications and Events, said "Cancelling the events was something we did with a heavy heart. We are aware that people love attending The Spree and Halloween events and we did not want to disappoint anyone—but with physical distancing restrictions likely to remain in place for some time, it was a call we had to make.

"Each event takes many months to plan and deliver. Cancelling them now allows us to get the 2021 programme underway and focus our energy on supporting the council's coronavirus response. We can't wait to welcome everyone back to the programme when the public health advice says it is safe to do so."

Volunteer Coordinator Valerija Tkacenko working from home.



Senior Events Officer Catherine Horsburgh working from home and enjoying the company of her son Cameron.

Events Assistant Lauren Kerr working from home.

Events Team Redeployment

With the major events now cancelled, our events staff have been temporarily deployed into a mix of new services working from home and key roles on the frontline and are putting their organisational skills to good use by supporting the council's coronavirus response. Here, we shine a spotlight on what they've been up to...

Gregg Young, Alan Gibson and Catherine Horsburgh have joined the pool of people contacting residents who are most at risk from the virus and have been asked to shield. Their regular phone calls help make sure those who need support are getting all the food and supplies they need and have the opportunity to chat to someone and access a wide range of additional support.

Lauren Kerr and Katie Cochrane have joined their communications colleagues as part of the newly-formed Social Media Customer Support Team (more on them later!)—answering the hundreds of questions we receive each week via Facebook and Twitter, while Katie has also volunteered as a driver with Environment and Infrastructure.

Valerija Tkacenko is helping to recruit and co-ordinate the work of our community volunteers who are helping those most in need across the area. Additionally, Val, Katie and Lauren have all assisted with the preparation of support and food packages for residents.

No place like home

Like many of us in recent weeks, our team of 9 Housing Support Officers have gone that extra mile to support their 250 service users through this particularly challenging time.

Their role is to provide support to adults of all ages where their housing situation may be vulnerable. This could mean they are homeless, at risk of homelessness, suffer with addiction issues, mental health issues, age related problems, convictions or domestic abuse. As many of us know all too well, human life is complex and often it's a combination of two or more of the above that a person is struggling with. The team provides a range of assistance to help individuals and support them to manage on a day-to-day basis living within and maintaining their own home.

Since the beginning of lockdown, the team have put additional measures in place to ensure people get the support they need. From delivering food and other essential items to helping individuals access benefits including Universal Credit and Crisis Grants. They've even delivered activity packs and art supplies and in one case, helped a service user procure a basic phone so they can keep in touch with family, friends and of course the team.

Team Co-ordinator Karen Perratt said she is 'continually impressed by the range of inventive problem-solving skills the officers are deploying' and that they are in contact with those who have housing support needs every single day.

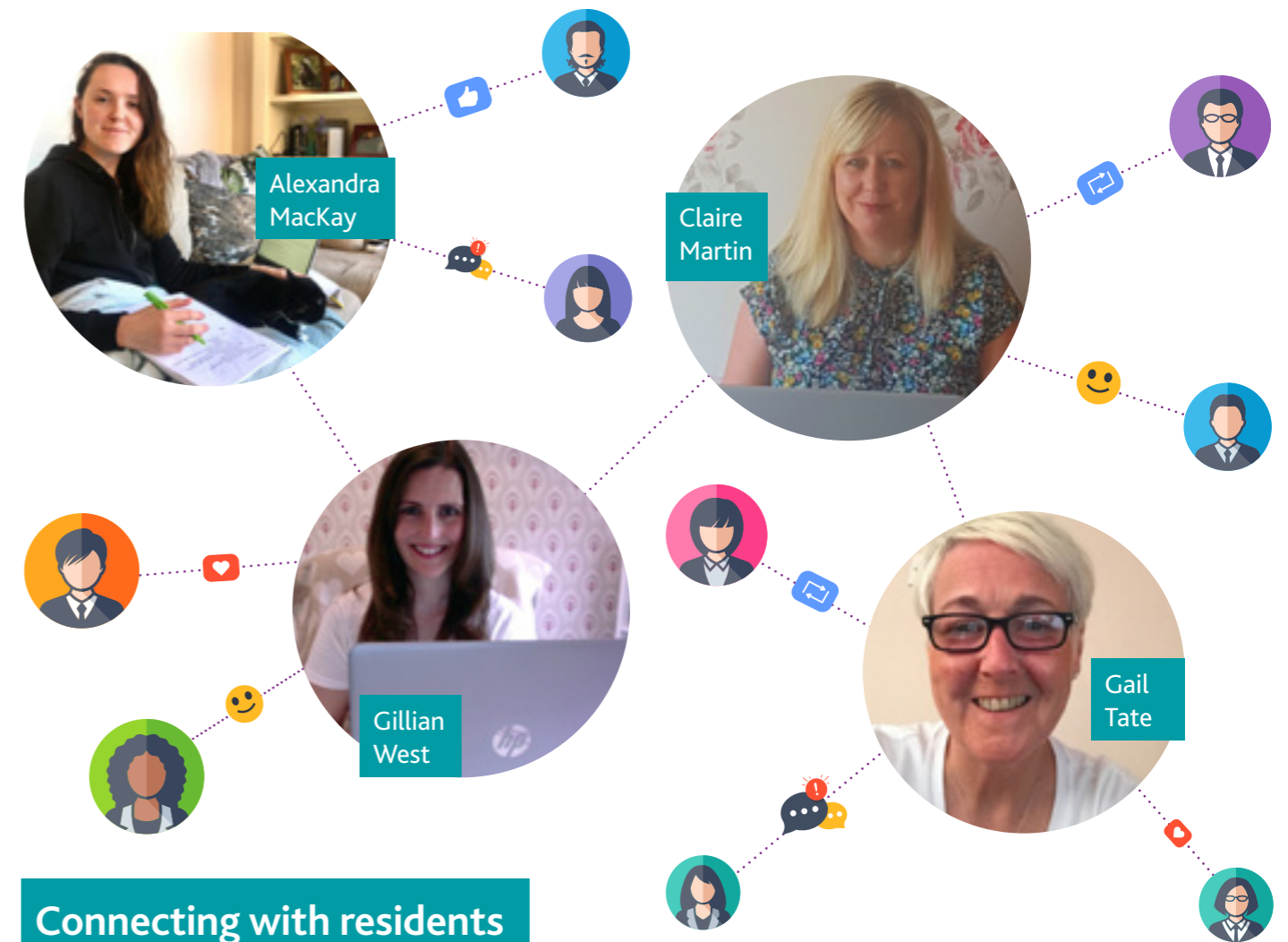
They have also been vigilant in keeping contact with those who have become homeless during this time to ensure they can access the support and benefits they need and are entitled to.

Senior Housing Support Officer Janey Irwin is pictured here visiting service users at a temporary homeless accommodation. She said 'everyone in the Housing Support Team has pulled out all the stops to make sure those who rely on us can contact us. We ensure no-one is ignored or left behind.'



Janey Irwin visiting residents at their temporary homeless accommodation.

Are you part of a team who are working hard to deliver frontline services during this challenging time? We want you to get the recognition you deserve! Send your stories to internalcommunications@renfrewshire.gov.uk



Connecting with residents

When we went into lockdown, a dedicated team was put together and given the task of responding to resident enquiries on social media.

Working 7 days a week, the Social Media Customer Service team consists of colleagues from Digital First, Customer Services and Communications, Marketing and Events teams working together to respond to queries and have issued more than 2,000 replies since March. This coordinated effort has helped the Renfrewshire community with issues such as replacement bins, childcare placements and shielding concerns. They have also been able to collect feedback from residents who get in touch to offer their praise to Council staff.

By engaging with more than 2,800 residents, the team have been able to respond to people very quickly and provide reassurance, and have helped to reduce calls to the Customer Service Centre –thereby allowing vital council resources to be funnelled into other critical areas.

Digital Delivery Officer, Gillian West, said "Social media is an important tool for delivering customer service. By using our social channels to respond to customer queries, we are able to engage with people

quickly and provide them with reliable and up-to-date information. By listening to what our customers are saying on social media we can proactively provide support and advice. We're also helping reduce demand on the Customer Service Unit (CSU) and help customers in an environment where they are comfortable and more likely to engage."

Customer Service Advisor, Gail Tate, who is a familiar face on the reception desk in the CSU, said she was "nervous about joining a new team but soon got to know the other staff and gained more confidence to tackle the daily challenges."

Claire Martin who is also based in Customer Services, has seen the benefits of using social media to communicate with residents. She said, "I really appreciate the technology we have and how it helps me keep residents up-to-date as we find answers for them in this difficult time."

Alexandra Mackay from the Digital First team said "It can be hard at times, trying to respond to people quickly and find them the right advice. But then you get a reply from someone you've helped and their relief and gratitude make it all worthwhile."



International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT)

The Rainbow Flag flies proudly outside Renfrewshire House this weekend as we mark the significance of IDAHOT 2020.

The impact of Coronavirus has been indiscriminatory and as such continues to affect people from all walks of life. Spokesperson Shann MacKinnon from the Renfrewshire Council Staff LGBT+ Network has this special message to share.

"Staying at home and living under the current restrictions can be described as less than ideal for most of us. But for those in the LGBT community who have not yet come out, or those who have but have not been accepted for who they are, this situation threatens to be a real danger to their mental health and wellbeing. For many, being at work, school, or in the company of friends was once a safe place and an option they currently don't have.

I want to assure all who may be struggling with these issues that although we have to be physically distanced right now, you are not alone.

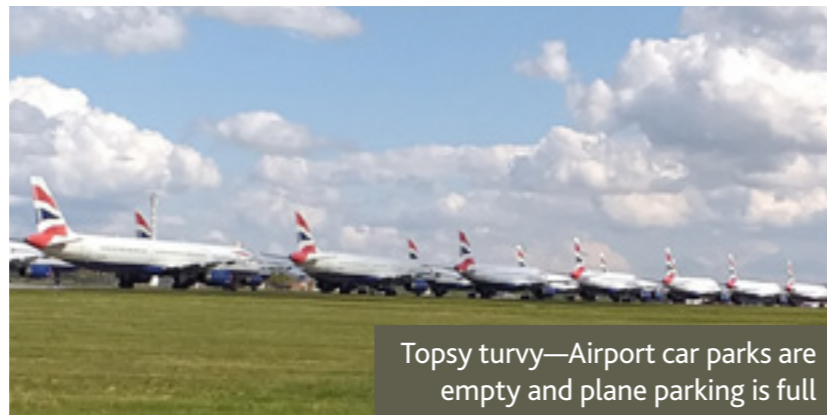
This is a time when we need to put aside what makes us different and look after each other, no matter our gender, race, or sexual orientation.

Your LGBT+ staff network is here for you. We are always open to new members and if you think you need support or just a friendly empathetic ear, please get in touch. We will do everything we can to help you through this difficult time. Just send me message at shann.mackinnon@renfrewshire.gov.uk".

Your New Normal

Special thanks to John Everett, Supervisory Engineer in the Roads Development Team, for sending us some superb photos of familiar local spots during lockdown. John said he has been enjoying the weekly newsletter, particularly the images showing how things are now different and the amazing work being carried out by staff to support our communities. Here's some photos from John's cycle route which give us a glimpse of his new normal.

We want to see some images of your new normal too! Whether that's a photo of you working from home, in action on the frontline or a scene from your daily exercise route. Send them in to us as internalcommunications@renfrewshire.gov.uk.



Topsy turvy—Airport car parks are empty and plane parking is full



Usually a bustling area, the only sounds are those of birdsong and the chime from the Paisley Town Hall clock



The River Cart in full bloom



A big thank you

Thanks to council staff for all our hard work have been pouring in. Not just on our public social media pages but also through direct messages, email, phone calls and face-to-face (to key workers at a distance!)

Here's just some of the notes of thanks we have received recently...

"I would like to thank all the employees who are continuing to work throughout this difficult period in order to support council services. They are doing a fantastic job."

Compliment received through Dash from local resident

"I think the service that I have been receiving from Housing Support has been great—as soon as I phone my housing support officer my requests are taken on board and are dealt with really quickly, thanks for your ongoing help and support"

Housing Support service user

"New green waste bin delivered. Many thanks for a prompt service."

Direct message from a local resident



"I just wanted to email to thank... everyone involved in the quick and efficient processing of our funded payment for April. It is greatly appreciated at this crazy time we all find ourselves in."

Message from staff member at Abbeymill Nursery



"I really appreciate your message back. That makes me feel a bit more settled. Thanks again."

Direct message from a local resident

A customer got in touch to pass her thanks on to Sheila McLellan who assisted with her Crisis Grant application. The customer said "the help and advice she got from Sheila and the manner in which Sheila dealt with my application was absolutely fantastic."

Phone call from local resident

There have been several phone calls from residents who have been very grateful to receive support packages. One lady was "ever so grateful" as she was at home without family support caring for her husband. She passed on her gratitude to all those involved and said it's very thoughtful that we also offer pet food. She said it made her feel "much better" to know support is in place.

Feedback received by staff organising support package distribution



"I know everyone is at full stretch and I fully appreciate the hard work everyone is putting in. Thank you for your reply."

Direct message from a local resident



Thanks to local businesses

This week we posted a thank you on social media to the many local businesses who have provided support to our staff and the people of Renfrewshire during this difficult time.

From feeding key workers and offering them a place to rest, to supplying goodies for food parcels going to those most in need, businesses in Renfrewshire have been fantastic. It's a hugely difficult time for local businesses themselves, but this kind, caring approach makes us so proud to call Renfrewshire our home.

We have encouraged local businesses to get in touch via social media to share their stories.



'Key worker **Rona Stewart** at our West Johnstone Childcare Hub very much appreciated the donation of pizza and chocolate cake from a local Italian Restaurant.

Social Shout Outs

We've received some more fantastic feedback this week on our social media channels. Here's just a few of the comments so far:



"@RenCouncil what a team you have dealing with the Small Business Covid-19 Grants Scheme. I made an application last night and was informed that it was successful today. A first class service and a lifeline for small businesses like mine. Thanks to Michael and his team, stay safe"

SHISH via Twitter

"Thank you for acting so swiftly and clearing everything away so swiftly, Sterling effort."

Brian Doherty via Facebook

"How nice to hear the council staff who are still working getting the recognition they deserve at such a perilous time at present. Well done guys!"

Jan Bunch via Facebook in response to Councillor Cathy McEwan's video of thanks to staff in Environment and Infrastructure

"I really appreciate your message back. That makes me feel abit more settled. Thanks again"

Ashleigh Meehan via Facebook

"@RenCouncil Thanks for circulating this. Really helpful and valuable to get questions/ concerns answered."

Leanne Baxter via Twitter in response to survey for parents and carers

"@RenCouncil Karen Anderson has gone above and beyond to help in the last few days. I cannot thank her enough for the help and support she has given. She is a huge asset to @RenCouncil and deserves the recognition for her commitment to the community"

Kathleen via Twitter



Share your stories and photos

Don't forget we'd love to hear from you! It could be a photo of you working from home, something interesting from your daily walk, or a photo of your new "colleagues" (furry friends most welcome!). Have you started volunteering or taking on new roles and responsibilities you never thought you would? Tell us all about it and we can share your stories. Send them in to internalcommunications@renfrewshire.gov.uk