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| REPORT TITLE: | Discharge of Roles and Responsibilities since the last meeting of the Council |
| REPORT AUTHOR: | Councillor Jenny Lynn |
| AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY: | Public Services |
| DATE: | February 2022 |

I am pleased to present this report on the activities of our frontline services over the past two months. The Omicron variant has led to increased levels of absence at times, putting more pressure on services, and I am grateful for the commitment of all our staff in doing their very best to sustain service delivery in these circumstances.

The growing cost of living crisis is affecting many of our residents, and as the report sets out, we are doing our best to try to offer what help we can.

In addition to overseeing the work of the Directorate, I co-chair the Calderdale Community Safety Partnership, whose executive met last month. This brings together the police, council services and other key partners to support the vital work of keeping our communities safe. Recent support from the West Yorkshire Mayor will see additional measures to enhance night time safety in some of our town centres and parks. The often 'behind the scenes' partnership working on these issues is Calderdale at its best.

CUSTOMER SERVICES

BENEFITS AND WELFARE

The Household Support Fund and the Covid Test and Trace Isolation Payment schemes have continued to impact on the Welfare and Benefits Service over the past 3 months. Despite this we have managed to maintain our progress with the other areas of financial support we provide local residents - Housing Benefit, Discretionary Housing Payments, Council Tax Reduction, Blue Badges, Free School meals and local welfare assistance. We still have some way to go to get back to our pre Covid position but the flexibility and commitment that our colleagues give will ensure that this will be achieved in time. Our focus is always on ensuring the applicant has the support they need through times of change.

In the first 3 months of the Household Support Fund (October – December 2021) we provided financial support for food and fuel costs to 5,580 single/couple households (working age and

pension age) and to 7,956 families with children totalling £923,940. Remaining funds will be distributed between January and March 2022.

The Covid T&T isolation payments surged over the Christmas and New Year period and a total of 1,346 applications for financial support have been received between 20 December 2021 and 19 January 2022 – this is the highest monthly figure since the T&T isolation payment scheme started in September 2020. We currently have 5 colleagues working on these full time.

CUSTOMER ACCESS

In the past few months, the Contact Centre has seen a significant increase in demand as payments from the Household Support Fund became available. Advisers have been assisting many customers with their online applications. December was particularly busy as payments were issued to families before the Christmas school holidays. The Early Advice Support Team (EAST) has also seen an increase in the number of customers who are in fuel poverty asking for help. The team make referrals to New Ground who are administering the scheme to supply those in needs with gas and electricity vouchers. The team have also seen an increase in requests for food parcels recently and requests for help from people who are self-isolating. The VSI volunteer hub have distributed the parcels and have matched volunteers to those requiring help.

Refresher training is ongoing and there is an increase in advisers able to assist customers with Council Tax queries. They are being coached and supported to become competent and confident when dealing with the massive increase in contact around annual billing.

Homelessness Prevention continues to offer face to face appointments Monday - Friday at number 42 Market Street and spent over 200hrs with customers during December. Winter Shelter opened on the 3rd December and the team referred 21 clients to the shelter in December of which 7 have now secured accommodation, many of whom presented with complex needs and inability to sustain a tenancy. We continue to work closely with our multi-agency partners to provide and develop holistic support to help people who have a history of rough sleeping or have complex needs and to endeavour to keep them in housing. The team continue to manage on average 200 cases per month delivering a range of services and advice for those at threat of homelessness or sleeping rough.

Customer First face to face support continues to take place in Central and Todmorden Library and this includes assisting customers who are digitally excluded with applications for disabled badges etc. Similar support will be offered from Brighthouse starting in February.

The Register office are seeing the expected seasonal increase in death registrations and there are still deaths related to Covid. Staff worked over the Christmas period to maintain delivery of death registrations, and we remain within capacity to deal with demand. In Spring/Summer 2021 (April to August) the team registered an average of 150 deaths per months. The average

for Autumn/Winter so far (September to December) is 184 per month, November having the highest figure of 198 registrations completed.

Four additional casual staff have been trained to be able to register births. This provides some resilience for the service to be able to keep on top of registrations should the death rate increase further, or if staff have to isolate due to Covid infections. Appointments are being booked around 2 weeks in advance.

There is high demand for ceremony bookings. There are several Fridays and Saturdays in June, July and August where all the late morning and afternoon slots at Spring Hall are completely booked up. This will lead to a similar high demand for marriage and civil partnership notice appointments, and the additional resource to deal with birth registrations will also help the team meet this.

The Web Team remain critical to ensuring customers can easily access accurate and timely information to help them with their Council business. They support various teams across the organisation with their page content and are continuously reviewing the whole site to ensure it is complying with EU Accessibility Regulations. They operate a stand-by rota, so they are available to assist our Comms and the Emergency Planning Teams with messages to the public out of hours where necessary.

The Chat function continues to be a key channel for those customers who are online and need some assistance and our Virtual Assistant has been key to us managing demand at peak times.

New webforms have been developed and implemented for customers to ensure easier access for them and to reduce duplication in the back office. The revised form for Noise Pollution was launched before Christmas and customers have feedback that they are impressed with the ease of which they can submit their noise logs to support their complaints. Discount forms for Council Tax have been combined and will be presented to customers on one online form which is a much easier and more efficient process.

More customers than ever have signed up to receive email reminders for their Waste and Recycling Collections – over 35,000 now take advantage of this service. Not only is this the most efficient and effective way for customers to receive reminders, but the same communication can also be used to alert them on disruptions to service.

NEIGHBOURHOODS & COHESION

Neighbourhood Teams

The new job-share Neighbourhood Co-ordinators for the Upper valley are now in post and completing their induction. They are Catherine Bann and Jane Leary. Catherine will focus on Todmorden and Jane will focus on Ryburn and provide some lower valley support while the lower valley officer is on maternity leave. A key current piece of work in the valley team is with

Cartwheel Community Centre which has been awarded funds to re-fit the building as part of Future High Streets fund. The team are providing support to refresh the committee and governance to ensure its future VSI will be invited to give additional support. The Central team are involved in the planned food festival working alongside the Inclusive Economy Park & Warley team in delivery.

Day to day work including clean ups, speed events, tackling ASB, ward forums and environmental blight work continue across all teams and Covid engagement work continues in Central and North.

Asylum and Migration

The Wool Merchant Hotel in central Halifax was stood up by the Home Office and Mears for contingency asylum accommodation for families only over the Christmas period. It is now full to capacity with 107 people accommodated including 35 children in total.

St Augustine's are providing support and most residents at the hotel have now visited them in Park ward. The Syrian & Afghan Refugee Resettlement team are also providing additional support and have been present at the hotel daily from Friday 14th January to help triage support needs.

In addition conversations are underway with Eureka Children's Museum to arrange some dedicated visits for families. The school admissions team are sourcing school places for children housed at the hotel and the Resettlement officers will be on site assisting people with registrations for them.

We now have 530 people in Calderdale who are seeking asylum, 87% of whom are accommodated in HX1.

Prevent Team

The Home Office bid for the 2022/23 funding will be submitted on Friday 21st January. With reduced funding available work on the bid has been extensive, exploring gaps in provision to determine what development with the voluntary sector can be undertaken to provide in-depth support to smaller cohorts of vulnerable individuals at risk of radicalisation. As part of this process the Prevent Team underwent a visioning day facilitated by the Commercialisation Team with a view to analyse its current position and explore what work is needed to strengthen its position moving forward.

During December/January we have had 10 Channel beneficiaries: 6 young people and 4 adults. Emotional health and wellbeing vulnerabilities and on-line activity remain key concerns, with 75% indicating a link to right wing ideology.

From October to December Prevent have delivered training to over 1000 people.

Cohesion & Equality Team

The team were closely involved in the delivery of the Holocaust Memorial Day event which took place on the 25th January at 6pm. The event was held by Zoom and hosted by Calderdale College with Calderdale Interfaith presenting the evening.

We are repeating our involvement with our West Yorkshire neighbours in Kirklees and Bradford for Srebrenica Memorial events this year and planning is now underway.

Hate Crime work continues with awareness/safe places training being delivered at Children's Centres alongside the development of new Safe Spaces. In addition, the Modern Slavery awareness training is expanding including briefings to all SCGs, training for all staff and a wide range of partners as well as a bespoke elected member training session and a further session for Town and Parish Councils.

A number of events took place during Interfaith week in November, including Calderdale Interfaith Annual meeting, the Imam and Clergy meeting and the annual Interfaith celebration at Halifax Academy.

The team are supporting the BAME action plan under the COVID Recovery plan delivery with CCG and Public Health.

Later in January our Principal Cohesion & Equality Officer will be presenting at the Citizenship Evening School organised by MP Holly Lynch for the democracy and activism session, which is all about how decision making, advocacy and accountability works. The school is for Years 11, 12 and 13 young people.

SPORTS SERVICES

The Premier League, The FA and Government's Football Foundation launched a new programme in October last year - the Local Authority Grass Pitch Programme . This is an exciting pilot initiative that aims to support the improvement of grass pitches in local authority areas. Expressions of interest were sought, and we are pleased to say that Calderdale has been selected as one of the Local Authorities they would like to work with.

This work will be a vital part of the FA and Football Foundation's ambition to ensure that communities across the country have access to 20,000 'good' quality grass pitches by 2030 and is exciting that Calderdale will be a part of it.

We will be using the Football Foundation's revolutionary web app Pitch Power to baseline the condition of all our grass pitch stock between January and March 2022. To help with this, the Foundation will pay for a Support Pitch Advisor (SPA) to train and support grounds maintenance teams.

We'll then work with our County FA to collate the key strategies and data to enable us to be ready to enter the full rollout of the programme in 2022.

There were also announcements around the similar time of October about the Government investing £22million into public tennis courts and we are pleased to **say** that the LTA have

approached Calderdale as a Local Authority they would like to work with and invest in to help improve our courts. The LTA have revised their funding approach and can now support the refurb on public park courts with grant funding (and not just interest free loan as was the case previously).

We will be working with the LTA this year on an audit of all Calderdale Parks with tennis courts, current court condition, estimated costs to refurb and lifecycle costs of the facilities stock. This will lead to improved courts and exploring operating models moving forward. More info is available on the following link.

<https://www.lta.org.uk/about-us/tennis-news/news-and-opinion/general-news/2021/october/lta-hails-governments-transformational-investment-into-public-park-tennis-courts-for-local-communities/>

2022 will also see us work with Todmorden Town Council and the Todmorden Town Deal Board on possible sports facility improvements at Centre Vale Park. There have long been talks about possible improvements to tennis, bowls and football (3G) facilities but the Town Deal funding, evidence from the Playing Pitch Strategy and ongoing strong relationships with the National Governing Bodies of Sport, these improvements are coming a step closer.

Memberships are now at 8453 compared to April 2020 which was 9,796. This makes us 86% of the pre covid membership which is a very positive and improvement from November last year.

School swimming has gone very well since starting in September with most children passing a level in each school in the Autumn term and some even passing the National Curriculum which is a credit to the swimming teachers after the children not having any lessons for over 18 months prior to starting back.

Out of school swimming lessons are steadily increasing and the introduction of the new I pads this week has gone well, not only is it much easier to track payments of these lessons but the reduction in paperwork and saving trees will be massive and time saving.

Usage figures are improving, and we are continuing to monitor sessions. Following feedback, we are this week adding a female only session at Sowerby Bridge, and will continue to review sessions to accommodate our customer needs

| Site | Usage November 1 st to December 31st |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Brighouse Pool | 36,807 |
| Sowerby Pool | 36,550 |
| Todmorden Pool | 28,531 |
| Northbridge Leisure | 12,731 |
| The Shay Stadium | 26,746 |
| Total | 141,365 |

The Better Living Service are continuing to provide the following support to residents of Calderdale:

Weight management support - we are here to support people in Calderdale to lose weight and be more active. Our partnership with Slimming World is continuing and 12 weeks of fully funded Slimming World vouchers are available for people who would like support to lose weight. We have increased this offer to more people than ever – vouchers are now available to most Calderdale adults (18+) with a Body Mass Index (BMI) over 25.

Physical activity support to enable people to meet their own goal around an activity of their choosing. This may include access to the active Calderdale membership which allows access to the Calderdale leisure services facilities for gym/swim/classes.

Alcohol reduction support for those scoring 5-10 on the Audit C tool.

Families support – working with the parent/carer of a child to enable them to be healthier.

Stroke Survivors programme – one to one support for anyone who has had a stroke within a 2-year period to increase/maintain their levels of physical activity and ability. We provide weekly support for up to 12 sessions. The client has an initial assessment with one of our trainers to identify the client's current level of ability and what their goals would be, the trainers then help the client work towards these goals through a programme of exercises and activities. During the sessions we will put a moving on plan together and try to link clients up with other relevant services for support to continue their recovery.

Better living service consultation

The way the better living team deliver services to adults via Public Health is being reviewed. This has a direct impact upon the Better Living Team. The Better Living Team work within Sports Services but are totally funded by Public Health. Due to the slight change in direction and allocation of monies to Staying Well along with associated budget reduction for the Better Living Team, there will be a restructure within the Service. The proposal is to reduce the service by 2 PT managers, consultation started on the 8 December 2021.

CULTURAL SERVICES

Community Asset Transfers

21st January 2022 is the deadline for a number of community groups to submit their full business case for Community Asset Transfer of library buildings. Officers will be assessing the information provided over the next few weeks, with a view to progressing these as soon as possible. It has been a real pleasure to work with these groups, who are committed and enthused with plans to breathe new life back into these buildings at the heart of their communities.

The Victoria Theatre

Since re-opening with large scale shows, the staff have been proactive in their planning to sustain a full autumn winter programme staging 102 performances.

The venue had to close due to COVID amongst the workforce on the 28th December, losing the last 5 performances of the pantomime.

The venue applied to DCMS Round 3 Cultural Recovery Fund and was successful in securing £160k to support the venue over the autumn and winter period. Through a strong and consistent planning process, the venue did not experience the anticipated fall off in sales from September onwards, but rather enjoyed almost 90% of pre-COVID sales, playing to over 53,000 people over this period, and receiving significant praise from the public on the hard work undertaken by staff to maintain a safe and welcoming environment.

In addition to staged events the venue has been working with CAFM to address ventilation issues and although this is causing some operational challenges these are being managed well by staff and are appreciated by customers. Ongoing works to resolve the final issues with ventilation continues.

The venue has started work on the Future High Streets Fund investment programme and have restarted the Drama Psychotherapy programme for Children and Young People to help support their recovery and wellbeing.

The theatre continues to lead on the delivery of a new Local Cultural Education Partnership for Calderdale, with a partnership agreement about to be signed. The theatre is a steering group member of the Thriving Communities (Arts and health) programme; and a steering group member of CalderdaleCreates, which has been supporting the creation of the new Cultural Strategy for Calderdale.

Cultural Development

Since the last update, the cultural strategy for Calderdale 'Where Creativity Flows' was approved by cabinet on Monday 17th January, following an extensive public consultation.

The cultural strategy provides a strategic framework for longer-term development. It will encourage and support inward investment through culture into the borough, by linking the development of culture to our landscape, our heritage, and the needs of the area. It will act as an aide-memoire to local, regional, and national cultural agencies/organisations and individual practitioners/freelancers to stimulate/enable partnership working and greater collaboration. It will support the sector to grow, thrive and increase engagement and participation in cultural activities across all communities. 'Living a Larger Creative Life', 'Creative Citizens', 'A Resilient Valley', 'Distinctly Calderdale' and 'A Thriving Cultural Scene', were identified as the five key priorities and will be the areas of focus for the cultural strategy delivery plan moving forward.

Overall, over 1600 people fed into the strategy through public events, focus groups conversations with cultural partners and wider stakeholders. A second 'Let's Grow Calderdale' event was held in Halifax Borough Market in December (attended by a further 500 people) used creative consultation to gather information about what activities and events Calderdale families wanted to see in their local area and in the programme for Calderdale's Year of Culture 2024. Click here for full the document: [Cultural Strategy](#).

Council will be asked to approve the strategy at their meeting on 9th February.

Libraries

Beechwood Road Library in Illingworth reopened on Monday 20 December following extensive repair work. The work has involved major upgrades to both the interior and exterior of the building and improvements to its energy efficiency. Facilities for visitors have also been upgraded, including the introduction of a self-service machine. The library is open Monday, Thursday and Fridays from 10.00 am until 5.00 pm and Saturdays from 10.00 am -until 1.00 pm.

Libraries have been a welcome retreat for families throughout these tumultuous times. Reading for pleasure, and nurturing a love of sharing songs, rhymes and stories is at the very heart of what we do in libraries. We have been delighted by the response from families as we return to our weekly events for children and families. Baby Bounce & Rhyme, for babies aged 0-2 and their families, has restarted at Brighouse on Tuesday mornings, and Halifax Central Library on Thursday mornings. Both have two sessions at 10.30 and 11.30 am. StoryTots for children 2+ are being held weekly at Hebden Bridge library on a Monday morning, and both Central and Todmorden Libraries on Wednesday mornings. Songs, rhymes and stories form the bedrock for a lifelong love and exploration of language and literature. The service is so excited to be welcoming families back to these fully safe and joyful events, considering all current precautions. King Cross Library and Akroyd Library, along with Bankfield Museum, hosted several days of Healthy Holidays activities for local children in receipt of Free School Meals just before Christmas. Local artists provided so many great activities, ranging from light up Rudolph's and fizzy Christmas trees to clay Christmas Tree decorations and making their own books.

The service has completed the project to provide self-service machines at all Calderdale Libraries with the installation of new self-service machines at Beechwood Road, Brighouse and Sowerby Bridge. All the self-service machines now offer a facility for contactless payments. The intuitive self-service solutions deliver an engaging experience for people of all ages and abilities – making borrowing and returning library items a breeze.

The service is honoured to have the "Elland Lockdown Banner" on display in Elland Library IT Suite. Each panel is a personal reflection of what was significant to local groups and individuals during the strange days of lockdown.

Museums

While we wait eagerly for the post-filming production work to complete for Gentlemen Jack and a release date to be announced we have been busy in Museums preparing for the anticipated interest that the next season will bring.

Shibden Hall interpretation is undergoing a re-write in consultation with staff and volunteers to ensure all information is correct and up to date. New information panels will be produced for each room in the House. The spare bedroom will be used to display what items we have directly relating to Anne Lister in a more accessible way for visitors to see. Preparations for the Anne Lister Birthday Week are well under way with an exciting programme of events

planned around Calderdale with a visit to Anne's home, Shibden Hall as the highlight. The Hall re-opens on 1st March.

Meanwhile Bankfield Museum has opened a new exhibition 'Shibden 600' looking at 600 years of the history of Shibden Hall and all its residents and users. Kate Lycett's exhibition 'Woodland Paths & Grand days Out' has been a great success. As a selling exhibition it has brought some much-needed income that will allow us to fund an upgrade to our exhibition lighting in the Main Hall of the Museum. We are working with colleagues in CAFM to prioritise building repairs and improvements throughout the building.

The Smith Art Gallery is now showing 'The Grand Tour' exhibition featuring many paintings and images from Calderdale's Collection on a theme of world travel.

NEIGHBOURHOODS

BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

Parkwood Crematorium

The service continues to be busy into 2022 with cremations in particular (which make up around 90% of funerals). We have made extra slots available on Saturdays to try and ease the waiting time. Normal service has resumed in the chapel with the remaining restrictions on numbers having been removed in November for attendees at funerals. We have now fully trained two casual front of house officers to bolster resilience in the service and they have both worked solo over the Christmas period, thereby allowing some rotation in duties within the crematorium staff. Feedback has been very positive and complimentary.

We hosted our annual Christmas Memorial and Carol service on 13th December (in conjunction with Brighouse Funeralcare) which was very well attended both physically and virtually as we arranged for it to be webcast to those unable to attend in person. We were very pleased to welcome The Mayor of Calderdale, Councillor Chris Pillai and The Mayoress Mrs Beverley Krishnapillai. The content was both secular and non-secular in nature as the service was taken by Civil Celebrant Sarah Garg and the Reverend Colin Sherwood from Southgate Methodist Church, Elland. Messages of remembrance were attached to the memory tree and candles were lit outside for loved ones.

At the end of November, we received delivery of 240 mixed varieties of saplings from the Woodland Trust which our two groundsmen have worked hard to plant in designated areas to encourage flora and fauna to flourish. One of our members of staff is also in the process of making bird and bat boxes for the grounds.

Cemeteries

Now we are into the quieter winter period, the service has moved into a seasonal maintenance regime where we focus our attention on other jobs rather than the green stuff that grows so quickly during spring and summer! We are currently undertaking site visits to both our operational and closed cemeteries to carry out tasks such as pathways and boundary maintenance, removal of saplings from graves, leaf clearance, tree surveys and memorial

cleaning. We are also keen to identify areas in our cemeteries that we can leave to nature and wildlife through the introduction of wildflower meadows. We are also hoping to introduce bird boxes in cemeteries as an alternative memorial idea, and, as always, we are keen to develop further links with volunteer/Friends groups, building on the success of the Friends of Lister Lane Cemetery.

TRANSPORT SERVICES

The Omicron variant has caused higher than usual absences throughout the Home to School Transport Team in January. In order to transport our most vulnerable pupils to schools, we have had to invoke our business continuity arrangements by using taxis or, in extreme circumstances, staggering the runs.

The Vehicle Services Team continue to maintain the Council's fleet of nearly 200 vehicles. Future fleet procurement will see more electric vehicles being added to the 30 we already have on fleet. We have appointed a new Training Officer in Vehicle Services who is catching up on all the driving assessments and training which was postponed due to the pandemic. Training is also being cascaded out to schools and will be available to other external customers once we've caught up with CMBC training.

Taxi Compliance Testing was postponed in March 20 due to the pandemic. Transport and Licencing colleagues have been preparing for re-opening of the Compliance Testing function and are phasing in the testing for new Licencing applications and vehicle transfers, commencing in January. Work is also ongoing to make improvements to the Taxi Compliance Test booking service, where customers will be able to book and pay for a Compliance Test online. This will streamline the service and customers can arrange a test without having to make a phone call or make an unnecessary trip to Battinson Road Depot to book over the counter. The booking system is in development and should be ready to use before the Compliance Testing is rolled out to customers requiring a renewal test.

Transport Services are the managing service for Battinson Road Depot which, with exception of the Taxi Compliance bay, has remained fully operational throughout the pandemic. Health and Safety Management, particularly around the Covid safety measures has been scrutinised twice through unannounced visits from the HSE. Both visits met the safety standards of the HSE Inspector, and one of them gave the verbal feedback of "The best site he'd seen so far!" This is a credit to all staff who work at Battinson Road who have adapted well to the new safety measures, and the Transport Services Health and Safety Committee which has representatives from all areas within the service is instrumental in promoting a proactive health and safety culture amongst the workforce.

COMMUNITY PROTECTION

The online noise reporting service went live on 1st December, where members of the public can report noise complaints through an online form, and similarly complete noise diaries online. Up to 12th January 2022, we have received 159 reports and have received four completed noise logs.

Automated emails have been set up so that customers are kept informed as to the investigating officer, giving them a name and email address, and also emailing the customers if the officer hasn't worked on the case for 21 days to let them know their job is still being investigated.

As well as noise issues, the service continues to be busy dealing with fly tipping reports (1,964 over the last 6 months) and concerns about dogs and dog fouling (289 reports).

In November, a multi-agency control room was opened in response to Storm Arwen as this resulted in over 980 properties being without power (some for as long as a 6 days) following a period of snow and high winds. The Team worked with partner agencies and other Council departments to support residents and businesses, and conduct welfare checks on the most vulnerable residents.

In November, we made an application for a Food Hygiene Prohibition Order before Leeds Magistrates Court due to an imminent risk of injury to health. The Court made an Order prohibiting the defendant or any third party from operating a food business from the premises identified within the order. This order will remain in place until the Applicant (Enforcement Authority) issues a certificate to the effect that they are satisfied that the defendant (food business operator) has taken sufficient measure to secure that the health risk condition is no longer fulfilled with respect to the food business.

Environmental Health also served a Food Hygiene Improvement Notice on a takeaway in Sowerby because of the owner's non-compliance. Prosecution proceedings were commenced under The Food Safety and Hygiene Regulations 2013. This went to court in November and resulted in a £1,600 fine, with £160 Victim Surcharge and £2,000 costs for the Local Authority to reflect enforcement and investigation costs.

WASTE & RECYCLING

Since the onset of the Covid pandemic, Suez have been struggling with a 'perfect storm' of challenges - which they have little or no control over – and which have been affecting their ability to deliver the service as per the contract specification.

- Staff testing positive through the various Covid waves – the Omicron variant has had a significant effect on the Suez workforce as on the return to work after Christmas (December 27th) only 3 employees were absent for Covid-related reasons, but a week later this had risen to 18 absences. When other sickness and holidays are factored in, as many as 25 employees have been absent on a daily basis, which is around 23% of the workforce.

- Suez' staff being 'pinged' or contacted by test and trace, and required to isolate
- Indirect Covid-related absence (e.g. child / caring issues)
- 'Normal' pre-booked annual leave and non-Covid-related sickness
- Unprecedented volumes of material continuing to be presented due to lockdowns, more people working from home, increased home shopping with the associated packaging etc.
- A particular problem in recruiting and retaining HGV drivers (with a national shortage estimated at over 100,000 drivers, they are at a premium and so can find alternative/easier/better paid work with not too much difficulty)
- Continuing issues with access in some areas (perhaps compounded by home working), meaning collections are taking longer if crews have to continually 'drag out' and this then affects households later in the round who end up with no collection that day.

These problems have resulted in almost continuous interruptions to normal service delivery over the past 22 months. In response, general waste collection has been prioritised due to the less frequent nature of collections (fortnightly) and the greater potential for environmental harm due to the nature of the material. Therefore, it has been the recycling service which has borne the brunt of staff shortages and seen the most interruption to service (Waste collections have operated as normal, except for access issues etc.)

It is envisaged that it will take 2-3 weeks to fully catch up the service, but the hope is that by February we should be in a far more settled position as absence levels are starting to fall.

Similarly, the driver shortage is improving; in November, Suez were 10 drivers short of the required amount (40), but this has now reduced to 4 due to recent recruits. A further advert is currently out, and Suez believe all vacant driver roles could be filled by the end of the month.

The updated driver position, combined with the decrease in Covid cases brings increasing optimism that the Waste and Recycling service can return to some sort of normality during the spring months, after the tumultuous times encountered over the last couple of years.

HWRC's remain open and are quiet, so those residents who have access to vehicles could use this option, and we are exploring temporary collection of food waste at the sites.

PARKING

Extended charging hours/days – The delivery of this project is now complete and there has been very little direct feedback (positive or negative) in relation to the changes. We will continue to monitor and review the impact of the changes but we need a complete 12-month period, which will include summer months, in order to be able to see the effect on income and compare to the projected figures.

Parking Permit System – the upgraded parking permit system should be going live on 28 February 2022. There has been a delay due to some technical issues but residents will benefit from a virtual permit system in the very near future.

Replacement Pay and Display Machines – work continues developing a replacement programme for the Council's stock of machines, some of which are now over 20 years old, and this will take account of both cashless payments and the development of a wider Parking Strategy.

Filming – the service continues to support the Events team with filming requests. There are three film crews working in Calderdale at present, and there is a significant amount of parking space across Halifax town centre affected due to closures throughout January/February. The aim is always to try and minimise the disruption whilst supporting activities which have much wider benefits to the Borough.

Mulcture Hall Road and High Street car parks – Part of these two car parks have been reserved for Lloyd's banking Group since the closure of the former Cow Green multi storey car parks in January 2013. These leases will end on the 31 January 2022 and the two car parks will revert to being available for public parking at all times.

COVID Vaccinations – Parking Services continues to support the COVID vaccination and testing work as and when required. The existing agreement for the walk-in test site, located at Daisy Street car park, Brighouse has been extended for a further 6 months (until June 2022).

GREEN SPACES AND STREETSCENE

We are in the process of compiling bespoke maintenance plans for all parks and green spaces in the Borough so that each area is maintained to an appropriate and affordable standard. This will give a degree of parity across similar facilities, e.g. district parks, and will also mean that members of the public will be able to access information about what we do and why – from frequency of grass cutting to litter picking and bin emptying.

As part of this, slope assessments have been completed and maps have been produced to show which plant is to be used (and not used) at all locations. This has revealed a few sites where it is not possible to cut the grass safely and so alternative forms of maintenance are being explored.

Plans are in place to reopen Jungle Experience and the walled garden at Manor Heath this spring, as we are aware how much these facilities are valued by residents and visitors. We hope to also include a new 'arid area' within Jungle Experience and a small retail outlet selling plants grown on site.

The next phase of our playground improvements will be starting shortly, meaning a further 14 play areas will be upgraded and so, by the end of the year, over half of the 110 playgrounds in the Borough will have benefitted from this five-year investment programme.

The winter service team has been busy with gritting activity over the past few months, working out of temporary facilities at North Bridge whilst the new Salt Barn is completed. The salt piles will now be run down in time for preparatory work for the new leisure centre to commence next

month, and the service will now benefit from being able to reduce the amount of salt needed to effectively carry out winter grit runs, with both environmental and financial benefits.

Finally, several new areas of wildflower beds have been prepared and seeded this winter, which should provide a burst of colour in spring/summer, as well as a welcome haven for animals and insects.