

# Report

Report to:	<b>Employee Issues Forum</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>29 September 2020</b>
Report by:	<b>Executive Director (Finance and Corporate) Executive Director (Education Resources)</b>

Subject:	<b>COVID-19 Update on Education Recovery</b>
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## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ♦ Update the Forum on the Education response to the national lockdown as a result of COVID-19.

## 2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Forum is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the content of the report be noted.

## 3. Background

- 3.1. All schools in Scotland were closed from 20 March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, with a national lockdown announced that following weekend.
- 3.2. The initial COVID-19 response focussed particularly on:
- ♦ The safety and welfare of vulnerable children.
  - ♦ The provision of emergency childcare for the children of key workers.
  - ♦ Making provision for the continuity of learning for all children.
  - ♦ Engagement with parents, carers, children and young people and employees.
- 3.3. Work was undertaken to support schools following the announcement that the 2020 SQA examination diet was to be cancelled and replaced by awards based on school estimates.
- 3.4. Emergency childcare hubs in 20 schools and 6 nursery centres were set up across South Lanarkshire staffed by volunteers. Separate provision was also established for young people with particular ASN requirements.
- 3.5. Systems were put in place to provide meals for children entitled to free school meals, superseded by a system of direct payments to families.
- 3.6. Home learning was established, mainly provided through GLOW, and schools and teachers were supported by the provision of the SLC Staff Learning Centre which hosted resources and materials as well as providing information and training materials relating to new technologies and new ways of working.
- 3.7. This was supplemented by the provision of learning packs and a range of materials by schools and the Youth Family and Community Learning Service.

- 3.8. In April, the legislation relating to the expansion of Early learning and Childcare by August 2020 was revoked in recognition of the suspension of all construction work, including new builds and adaptations. Admissions for August 2020 were reviewed in light of the delays. Further information is provided in section 7 of this report.
- 3.9. At this time planning and preparation for learning in term 4, including transition planning for those due to start P1 and S1 in August 2020 took place.
- 3.10. Throughout the period of closure, Education has been represented on the NHS Incident Management Team, enabling access to up-to-date medical information and advice.

#### **4. Local Phasing Delivery Plan - Preparing for recovery in schools/educational settings and services**

- 4.1. In June, the Scottish Government announced that schools would reopen for staff on 11 August 2020 and for pupils from 12 August 2020, based on a 'blended learning' model – a blend of part-time attendance at school and part-time home learning – to allow for physical distancing to be observed.
- 4.2. Planning for restart was initiated and an Education Recovery governance model and was developed. Education Resources prepared a Local Phasing Delivery Plan within the wider context of the South Lanarkshire Council Recovery Plan. The Local Phasing Delivery plan set out: its place within the Council plan, the key areas of activity, a timeline for recovery and detailed action plans for each recovery theme. Section 4 sets out the major themes and a summary of areas of activity.
- 4.3. Ongoing communication and consultation with stakeholders, including headteachers of primary, secondary and additional support needs schools, representatives of the professional associations and unions, took place and detailed advice was provided to schools and education establishments enabling them to complete their individual and detailed plans for reopening.
- 4.4. It was subsequently announced on 24 June 2020 that schools would re-open in August 2020 on a full-time basis subject to the ongoing control of the virus and low levels of infection in the community. Further announcements confirm that there is no requirement for pupils to socially distance in schools or on transport to and from schools. The Local Phasing Delivery Plan was reviewed to consider the implications of this change.
- 4.5. As part of the Local Phasing delivery plan the Education Recovery Consultative Group (ERCG) was formed. The ERCG includes stakeholders and partners from a range of services, resources, trade unions and Public Health NHS Lanarkshire. The purpose of the group is to involve, support and work in partnership with key stakeholders in sharing information through dialogue and consultation to influence and shape our Covid19 recovery plans in support of Education Services and the five recovery themes outline in Appendix 1.
- 4.6. On 30 July 2020, the First Minister confirmed to the Scottish Parliament that schools would reopen for all pupils in August 2020 and provided further guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term. The key steps taken in respect of reopening schools are described in section 5, based on the Scottish Government Guidance <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-preparing-start-new-school-term-august-2020/>

- 4.7. Provision of emergency childcare hubs concluded on 5 August, allowing those buildings to be included in the preparatory programme. This followed national advice that emergency childcare hubs were not required from 31 July 2020 to enable schools and educational settings to prepare for pupils and staff returning in August 2020. A contingency plan for the provision of emergency childcare is in place, should it be required to re-start.

## **5. Reopening of schools**

- 5.1. The national guidance on the re-opening of schools highlighted, that *we do not expect the return to school in August to be a return to normality*. Given that children and young people have not been in school since March, it was important that both staff and pupils had the opportunity to become familiar with the new layouts in their school, introduce hygiene practice of washing or sanitising, implement arrangements for entering and exiting, lunch and interval breaks and new routines. Following engagement and dialogue with the professional association and trade union representatives, it was agreed that Tuesday 11 August is an in-service day for staff with children and young people returning initially on a phased basis beginning Wednesday 12 August 2020, with all children and young people returning full time from Monday 17 August 2020.

### **5.2. Safety and infrastructure**

School and educational establishment buildings were prepared prior to reopening. This included 'deep cleaning' and the provision of hand sanitisers, soap and PPE, as per the risk assessments and in line with medical advice. Work was undertaken jointly with the facilities team, Community and Enterprise Resources, to plan enhanced cleaning schedules and for the safe provision of school meals. National advice and guidance provided detailed recommendations on a number of areas including:-

- ◆ Infection control
- ◆ Hygiene measures
- ◆ Risk assessments
- ◆ Cleaning specification
- ◆ PPE
- ◆ Test and protect protocols

- 5.3. A response protocol in the event of localised COVID-19 outbreaks is being developed in partnership with Public Health NHS Lanarkshire on a pan Lanarkshire basis which will see the establishment of an Incident Management Team led by health if positive cases or clusters occur.

- 5.4. In line with the Scottish Government guidance, further advice has also been developed to limit the number of adults e.g. peripatetic staff, external visitors/speakers attending school buildings including restrictions on parents and carers entering school buildings.

### **5.5. School Transport**

The national guidance states that dedicated school transport should be regarded as an extension of the school estate and it is not necessary to maintain distance between children and young people of all ages (subject to continued low levels of infection within Scotland). Important mitigations include: hygiene, ventilation, improved cleaning regimes including regular and thorough cleaning of surfaces, and regular handwashing. Hand sanitising is required for everyone prior to boarding dedicated

school transport. The Council continues to work closely with contractors, including ASN taxis contractors to support the safe travel of pupils.

- 5.6. The use of active travel routes by parents/carers, staff and children and young people is also being encouraged, as well as schools working with local communities to appropriate identifying *park and stride* options.

## **6. Supporting pupils**

### **6.1. Mental health and wellbeing**

It is recognised that there will be a requirement to support pupils in a number of ways. The Education Committee reports on (i) *the preliminary results of survey consultations with Children and Young People and Parents/Carers regarding Covid-19 experiences and return to school* and (ii) *Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing through transition, reconnection and recovery: an attachment informed approach* provide an insight to the issues that schools may face and the approaches that will be taken to support children and young people's emotional wellbeing.

### **6.2. Pupils with additional support needs**

Education Resources' *Framework for Inclusion and Equality* provides a clear process for supporting children and young people with additional support needs and is based on a staged intervention approach. It is acknowledged that the individualised planning outlined within the framework will be vital in the days and months ahead and focussing on additional support plans/coordinated support plans, where appropriate, taking account of specific need. Schools and establishments have been asked to revisit the staged intervention processes to assess emerging need.

### **6.3. Vulnerable pupils**

The period of lockdown has been challenging for many members of our community and this includes vulnerable children and young people. Close working between colleagues in Education Resources and Social Work services as well as a range of agencies and third sector partners has continued throughout the school closure period. A number of vulnerable children were able to access the emergency childcare hubs during this time.

- 6.4. As schools return, support will continue for children and young people at risk of harm including providing support for their learning. School leaders will work with the relevant Council Senior Manager Pupil Support (SMPS) or Inclusion officer as they have the overview of vulnerable children within areas through the period of lockdown. The SMPS and Inclusion officers will advise schools on any additional support or liaison that has taken place, or may now be required.

### **6.5. Learning**

The Curriculum and Quality Improvement Service provided schools with detailed *Recovery Guidance* on supporting learning. The learning focus for our schools as they return will be based on the following areas:

- ◆ Health and wellbeing;
- ◆ Equity; and
- ◆ Continuity of learning

The Recovery Guidance highlights that schools need to give careful consideration to the curriculum and teaching approaches in place to ensure maximum impact for learners. This document is designed to support school leaders and management

teams plan for the recovery phase regarding Curriculum and School Improvement. It provides guidance, points to consider and reflection stops.

#### **6.6. Digital Learning**

There has been a significant focus on the role of digital technologies to support communication and contact, and as a platform for teaching and learning. During the period of extended school closure, a website was created to support continuity of learning called the South Lanarkshire Council Staff Learning Centre. All teachers, support assistants and early years workers were given to access this site.

6.7. The site provided information and guidance documents during the ever changing landscape at the time of extended closure, access to a range of resources that could be used to support learning at home, advice and links for Health and Wellbeing, Career Long Professional Learning and advice from GTCS and other national bodies.

6.8. Some key digital developments included the introduction of Guardian Email Summaries that allows teachers to send updates of classwork and homework directly from Google Classrooms to parents and carers, and Google Meet for Learners, allowing videoconferencing to take place with learners.

6.9. The importance of access to digital technology and connectivity for children and young people has been highlighted nationally and internationally over the past few months. While many of our schools distributed their own devices to pupils, there has been national agreement that a more permanent solution was needed. Consequently, the Scottish Government has provided grant funding to support digital inclusion. South Lanarkshire Council submitted a successful bid for 5400 Chromebook devices, 300 laptops and 800 connectivity solutions to enable families to access digital resources and blended learning approaches as we progress into the new term.

6.10. Approximately 2200 chromebook devices have been provided to children identified as high priority in order to support their learning using digital platforms. Almost 500 families have been provided with mi-fi devices and data plans to allow them to access the internet. A further 3500 devices and 300 connectivity packages have been provided through schools to support families facing difficulties with digital access. These will be distributed on the basis of work undertaken with schools to identify children and young people from backgrounds of deprivation who do have access to digital technology.

#### **7. Early Learning and Childcare provision**

7.1. As a consequence of the cessation of all construction works, the capital programme for delivering 1140 hours has been delayed. This resulted in insufficient physical capacity to provide all children with 1140 hours places, as had been planned.

7.2. Admissions were reviewed and places reallocated. All families (approximately 7300 children so far) have been allocated the statutory minimum of 600 hours, however, it has been possible to provide 1140 hours places to almost 6000 (83%) eligible families. As the capital programme progresses, it is anticipated that further 1140 hours places will be able to be offered.

7.3. Approximately 2200 families are accessing places through our contracted funded providers, all at 1140 hours. This is a similar proportion to previous years. As per

national guidance, the funded providers continued to be paid their contracted amounts during the period of lockdown to support the sustainability of the sector.

## **8. Workforce**

8.1 Additional teachers have been recruited in line with the Scottish Government commitment to offer all Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT) a post. In addition to the 90 NQTs already recruited to permanent posts, a further 74 FTE have been appointed to temporary posts to support the recovery process. Further funding by the Scottish Government will lead to more additional temporary posts, estimated to be in the region of 30 FTE.

8.2. In line with the recent Scottish Government announcement, additional support staff, including school support assistants are being recruited to support recovery. The allocation of staff will support ongoing staffing requirements and identified pupil need.

## **9. Employee Implications**

9.1. As noted in section 8, just over 100 FTE teachers and support staff have been recruited on a temporary basis, utilising additional funding provided for this purpose.

## **10. Financial Implications**

10.1. Grant funding of £1.42m was made available to support the provision of digital devices and connectivity solutions as mentioned in sections 6.6 and 6.7.

10.2. Further funding has been announced by the Scottish Government to support additional costs for cleaning, transport and other measures to ensure the return of schools. The funding process allocation is being discussed with COSLA and the Scottish Government.

## **11. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications**

11.1. There are no implications for climate change, sustainability or the environmental in terms of the information contained in this report.

## **12. Other Implications**

12.1 The requirement to update risk assessments is set out in the Scottish Government guidance and steps have been taken to do this as the safety and wellbeing of all adults, children and young people is paramount.

## **13. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements**

13.1. This report does not present a new strategy, policy or plan and is therefore not subject to equality impact assessment.

13.2. Consultation has taken place with a wide range of stakeholders on a variety during the period of school Closure including children and young people, parents, staff and unions in a range of areas such as digital access, safe return to school, emergency childcare, access to free school meals.

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**Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)**

**Tony McDaid**

**Executive Director (Education Resources)**

3 September 2020

**Link(s) to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives**

- ◆ Increase achievement, raise educational attainment and support lifelong learning
- ◆ Protect vulnerable children, young people and adults

**Previous References**

- ◆ Education Committee – 3 March 2020

**List of Background Papers**

- ◆ Education Resources Local Phasing Delivery Plan
- ◆ Scottish Government Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020

**Contact for Further Information**

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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