

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE- 23 JUNE 2020

RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE – STEPS FOR ANGUS SCHOOLS

**REPORT BY KELLY McINTOSH, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG
LEARNING**

ABSTRACT

This report provides the committee with an initial analysis of the steps required for Angus schools and of the on-going and future financial implications for Education and Lifelong Learning arising from the initial response to Covid-19 and of the support required for families once schools re-open in August 2020.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:-

- (i) Approves, if required, the alteration to how funds allocated for 'holiday food and fun' are spent, as outlined in section 4.2 and notes the use of funding from the Scottish Government "Food Fund" to fund the additional costs of providing free school meals during the school summer holiday period.
- (ii) Approves the re-purposing of monies within the Early Learning and Childcare budget towards the cost of COVID19 'childcare hub' provision during the summer holiday, as set out in section 4.3.
- (iii) Notes the use of funds from the Tayside Regional Improvement Collaborative, as outlined in section 4.4.
- (iv) Authorises the recruitment of additional temporary teachers and support staff to manage our response to COVID19 fairly and equitably as outlined in Section 5 and approves the proposed approach to funding these as set out in the Financial Implications (Section 6).
- (v) Notes that social distancing and other measures will result in additional costs in a number of areas of the Education and Lifelong Learning budget which are currently being assessed in detail and will be subject of a separate report to committee, possibly as part of the Council's planned review of the 2020/21 budgets.

**2 ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS LOCAL OUTCOMES IMPROVEMENT
PLAN/CORPORATE PLAN**

This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the **Angus Local Outcomes Improvement Plan** and **Locality Plans**:

- The best start in life for children
- Improved physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing
- More opportunities for people to achieve success

The **Tayside Plan** for children young people and families 2017-20

- Reduce inequalities and disadvantage

- Protect the most vulnerable from harm
- Take the right action to prevent needs arising in the first place
- Provide the right support to meet needs at the earliest appropriate time
- Deliver individualised, proportionate and whole family-based support
- Provide services which are experienced as integrated and consistent
- Involve children, young people and parents in the design of services
- Develop holistic services for children, parents and communities
- Improve outcomes

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Angus Council closed all schools as of 24 March 2020 following Scottish Government instruction. Since that date all schools have used a variety of methods to support learning at home. This will continue until Friday 26 June, the end of school session 2019-20.
- 3.2 In August 2020, assuming infection rates indicate that it is safe to do so, all Angus schools will offer a blended-learning approach. This will see almost all children and young people attend school for a proportion of the week and continue with learning at home when they are not in school. Special arrangements will be put in place for those children and young people who are shielding, including supporting some children with outreach approaches.
- 3.3 Angus Council, as education authority for the Angus Area, has a number of statutory duties as regards education. These duties include:-
- i. Securing that there is made for their area adequate and efficient provision of school education,
 - ii. To provide primary and secondary school provision for not less than 190 days a year,
 - iii. To provide or secure the provision of free school meals to certain pupils,
 - iv. To make adequate and efficient provision of additional support for pupils with additional support needs,
 - v. To secure that the mandatory amount (specified by the Scottish Ministers) of early learning and childcare is made available for each eligible pre-school child belonging to its area.

The Coronavirus Act 2020 provides the following in relation to schools and education:-

- a. A requirement on the operators of educational establishments to have regard to any advice relating to the incidence or transmission of coronavirus from the Chief Medical Officer of the Scottish Administration or such other person as may be designated by the Scottish Ministers.
- b. The Scottish Ministers have the power to give directions in relation to access to educational establishments being restricted for a specified period (an “Educational Closure Direction”).
- c. An Educational Closure Direction can relieve the operator of an educational establishment from the failure to comply with a legal obligation to the extent that the failure would be attributable to the Direction (such as the duties referred to in (i) to (v) above).
- d. An Educational Closure Direction may require the taking of actions in general terms, or require the taking of particular actions, that the Scottish Ministers consider reasonable and make such other provision as the Scottish Ministers consider appropriate.

- e. The Scottish Ministers have the power to give directions in relation to the continuing operation of an educational establishment for a specified period (an “Educational Continuity Direction”).
- f. An Educational Continuity Direction can relieve the operator of an educational establishment from the failure to comply with a legal obligation to the extent that the failure would be attributable to the Direction (such as the duties referred to in (i) to (v) above).
- g. An Educational Continuity Direction can impose a wide range of requirements in relation to, for example, opening times for schools, the attendance at educational establishments of specified groups of people, prohibiting or restricting access to an educational establishment, requiring measures to ensure safe standards of hygiene and other measures to protect health be put in place and require the alteration of term dates, holiday dates or examination dates.
- h. An Educational Continuity Direction has effect until the end of the period specified in the direction or until revoked by the Scottish Ministers. If the Direction relieves a failure to comply with a legal requirement then it must be reviewed every 21 days.

Two Educational Continuity Directions have been made by the Scottish Ministers. It is anticipated that these Directions will continue to be issued setting out what is expected of the operators of educational establishments as approaching 11 August 2020 when it is anticipated that schools will re-open. The current Directions include:-

- 1/ Requiring each education authority to plan and prepare for children to resume attendance at schools (including nursery schools and nursery classes) at the earliest time it is safe to do so having regard to guidance issued by the Scottish Ministers.
- 2/ Permit access to schools (so long as it is safe to do so) for the purpose of planning and preparing for the provision of learning and teaching on school premises and remotely from August 2020 and early learning and childcare.
- 3/ To continue to support in-home learning.
- 4/ To continue to provide education and childcare for the children of key workers.
- 5/ To secure alternative provision for free school meals where the education authority is unable to secure these itself.

4. PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Our immediate and on-going efforts to support our learners at home have had, and will continue to have, unforeseen and unplanned cost implications as outlined below. In the absence of any further additional funding from Scottish Government it will be necessary to repurpose funds and draw on contingency funds to offer a consistent, fair and equitable experience for our children and young people at this time.

The following actions are either underway or are proposed in the recommendations of this report:

4.2 Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement including the use of funding for Holiday Food and Fun

In setting the budget in February the council agreed a sum of £180,000 was to be provided through the Change Programme for 'holiday food and fun' and other work to address child poverty for financial year 2020/21.

The full planned programme of activity will not take place due to current Scottish Government COVID-19 guidance but there does remain a need to provide support for those families most in need.

Just prior to the publication of this report Scottish Government announced additional funding of £27m to, among other things, support continued provision of free school meals to eligible children over the summer holidays. At the time of writing no further information on the detail, conditions or Angus share of funding is available.

In the absence of this detail the Committee is being asked to authorise, if required, that the £180,000 holiday food and fund monies be used to contribute to the provision of food to those entitled to FSM during the summer holidays. The use of these funds would only be if the additional funding from Scottish Government announced on 16 June 2020 provided to be insufficient.

4.3 Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and the provision of critical childcare during school closure and part-time opening

Report 183/20, which is also on the agenda for this meeting, sets out details of the key supplier support provided by the Council. This includes financial support to private providers acting as 'key worker childcare hubs' which is being funded using the existing Scottish Government ring-fenced ELC expansion revenue grant. Use of this ring-fenced grant for this purpose has been agreed by Scottish Government and it is recommended that these funds continue to be used to ensure provision of key worker childcare hubs during the summer holidays. However, this budget cannot sustain costs if the requirement is to continue this provision for all of school session 2020-21.

4.4 Learning at home

The closure of schools necessitated that all schools moved to a model of home learning. In August 2020 learning at home will continue to be a significant part of a 'blended curriculum'.

As permitted by Scottish Government guidance Angus Council will use funds allocated from the Tayside Regional Improvement Collaborative to appoint 2 temporary digital learning officers. This resource will contribute to the development of an Angus home learning platform for learners and school staff and support training for staff.

5 SCHOOL SESSION 2020 - 2021

5.1 The proportion of children and young people that may be accommodated within our schools for the phased re-opening of all schools in August 2020 is dependent upon a number of variables including (a) the number of staff available to return to work (b) the capacity of our buildings (c) the capacity of transport and (d) our knowledge of the support needs of our children and families. Each school has a unique context and therefore the detail of the offer will vary from school to school.

As directed by Scottish Government guidance, our continued provision of key worker childcare must also be taken into consideration when assessing capacity.

Our Local Phasing Delivery Plan and individual school recovery plans will outline our offer for August. Our priorities are to ensure that schools are safe places for our children, young people and staff and that provision is fair and ethical.

5.2

- (a) Staffing: Each Head Teacher is assessing these variables to maximise attendance whilst ensuring that they provide an environment which is safe and conducive to learning.

As at 15 June 2020 information shows that 48 teachers and 21 school and pupil support assistants (SPSAs) are not available to attend the workplace as they are shielding, currently until 31 July. Should this remain the case beyond that date, this reduces the in-school learning offer and our capability to offer targeted support, essential to close any increase in the poverty related attainment gap. Given what we know about the need for longer term physical distancing the shielding group is likely to have some restrictions on their engagements.

The Test & Protect system where contact tracing could impact on one or more schools at any one time might also lead to higher than normal absence levels in our workforce at any one time. This creates a risk of further reductions in what a school might be able to offer children should a Coronavirus infection cluster occur in a village, neighbourhood or town.

Approval is sought to actively recruit up to 40 temporary teachers for the period August-December 2020. This increases our cohort of teachers by 3.5% for 5 months and will mitigate the risk of a further reduction in face to face teaching as the session gets underway.

Approval is also sought to actively recruit up to 10 FTE temporary school and pupil support staff for the period August to December 2020 and to increase the hours of 50 staff with existing contracts which are currently less than full-time. This increases our cohort of SPSAs by 6% for 5 months and will mitigate the risk of the additional support needs of children and young people not being appropriately met.

Should government guidance allow for a full-time return to school prior to December the additional staff will be utilised to provide targeted support as part of our efforts to close the attainment gap.

- (b) The capacity of our buildings: in accordance with social distancing measures as presently required it is not possible to accommodate all our children at the same time in the vast majority of our buildings. Headteachers have been setting out their plans for ensuring children and young people get a fair and equitable experience of face to face learning. The details of each school's plan will be available shortly and will be communicated direct to parents and carers. Fundamentally this means a very different model to the school week from what we know. This is expected to result in increased costs and a requirement for children and young people to be involved in home learning for periods of the week.
- (c) The models for learning being considered by our headteachers and schools involve family groups attending school at the same time where possible. Some of our families

travel on school transport. With the current social distancing measures, it is anticipated we will require more journeys with fewer children and young people each day. The costs and funding options for this are not yet finalised and will be subject to a future report.

- (d) Some of our children and young people will be unable to attend school because they are shielding. We have a statutory duty to educate all our children. We are currently considering an outreach model to support our most vulnerable children and young people. The costs and funding options of this will be subject to a future report.
- (e) In accordance with current Public Health Scotland and Scottish Government advice schools will have new safety and hygiene routines in place. This necessitates the use of hand sanitiser, personal protective equipment (PPE) and an enhanced cleaning regime. The costs and funding options of this will be subject to a future report.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The provision of FSM to all those who are entitled to receive them during term time will cost in the region of £250K for the summer holiday period. These costs are proposed to be met from the additional funding for this purpose announced by Scottish Government on 16 June 2020 and on which more details are awaited. In the event that those additional funds prove insufficient the £180K available from the 'holiday food and fun' budget allocation is recommended to be directed towards this purpose.

6.2 Angus Council will receive in the region of £100K from the Tayside Regional Improvement Collaborative budget. This money is to be used to support digital inclusion and will cover the cost of the secondment of two digital learning officers for school session 2020 - 2021.

6.3 As outlined in Section 5 it is proposed to aim to recruit additional teachers to mitigate the potential loss of teaching capacity caused by continued shielding or absences caused by staff being required to self-isolate through Test & Protect. It is planned to increase capacity through the retention of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and recruitment of additional staff on a temporary basis.

The indicative cost of recruiting 40 teachers on a temporary basis is £800K. This is based on an average salary using the mid-point of the salary scale for the period 11 August to 23 December 2020.

6.4 The number of school and pupil support assistants will also require to be increased to support children with the disruption caused to their learning, both face to face and at home. This will be achieved through a mix of recruiting more staff and increasing the hours of existing staff. This is the equivalent of 21 staff for a five-month period at a total estimated cost of £126K.

6.5 As members of the Committee will appreciate the staffing challenges facing Angus schools to deliver learning in a COVID-19 environment from August 2020 will be common across Scotland. Angus is not unique in anticipating staffing shortfalls due to shielding and self-isolating and the additional costs to enable the provision of the best education and learning experience possible in current circumstances will be significant for all Councils. On this basis officers believe there is a strong case to be made to Scottish Government for additional financial support for Councils to recognise the exceptional and additional costs arising. This will be pursued through COSLA.

- 6.6 At the time of writing no additional funding for the cost of school provision from August has been confirmed. Recruitment of additional teaching staff will be difficult and cannot await confirmation of additional Government funding, which may in the end, not materialise. On this basis and to try to mitigate staffing shortages it is recommended that officers be authorised to recruit on a temporary basis (August to December 2020) the additional teaching and support staff outlined in Section 5.
- 6.7 The funding of the estimated additional staff costs of £800k (teachers) and £126k (support staff) would come from:-
- a. additional Scottish Government Grant for this purpose; or should that not be provided or prove insufficient
 - b. the use of the Council's General Fund uncommitted balance / contingency balance of £4m

While potentially having to use the uncommitted balances / contingency funding would reduce the Council's financial resilience for other issues this is considered a reasonable approach in the circumstances given the statutory duties which the Council must comply with as regards the provision of education, as well as the importance of education and lifelong learning and its place in the Council Plan and the urgency with which additional staffing provision needs to be progressed. If members of the Committee are not minded to support this proposal it will be necessary to adjust the education offer available based on the staffing available. This could be quite disruptive if existing staff are absent at short notice due to infection or a need to self-isolate but schools will still try to provide the best learning possible within those constraints.

- 6.8 There are expected to be additional costs in other areas of the Education and Lifelong Learning budget beyond the staffing elements above. These are currently being assessed and will be the subject of a further report outlining estimated costs and funding options.

7. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 A reduction in staffing capacity of the scale indicated for August 2020 will mean that may result in the Council being unable to meet its statutory duties as regards the provision of education, as outlined in paragraph 3.3.
- 7.2 Scottish Government have indicated that the expectation is that schools maximise their capacity for pupils to benefit from in-school learning. Failure to replace staff may result in an inequitable offer across our schools and in some schools offering significantly less time in school with children and young people most in need of support being further disadvantaged.
- 7.3 Schools re-opening is part of phase 3 of the Scottish Government 'route map' and this is planned to coincide with the re-opening of the retail and hospitality sectors. Parental expectation is that schools will accommodate children in school to allow them to return to work.
- 7.4 Neighbouring local authorities are also seeking to recruit to alleviate pressures on staffing. Delaying a decision to recruit will reduce the number of staff available.

8. CONCLUSION

This report outlines the challenges presented by the risk of COVID 19 and its management in our schools. It identifies the implications for the implementation of public health guidance in settings where children and young people are required to be physically distanced from one another. It gives an overview of the logistics undertaken to create a safe, equitable and fair system where our children and young people experience face to face and home learning.

The report outlines the challenges within the current budget for education to achieve this. At the time of publication, there is no indication of additional funding being made available from Scottish Government. Should this be forthcoming, a future report will be presented to elected members.

Without government funding and in order to support our children and families in Angus appropriately, the report concludes that additional funding will be required from contingency reserves. The essence of what this funding is and what it will deliver is detailed in the report.

Finally, the report highlights the immediate and urgent need to retain and recruit additional staff in order to ensure that we can support our children and young people appropriately across the county and equitably with other authorities in Scotland.

9. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of HR, Digital Enablement, IT and Business Support and the Director of Legal and Democratic were consulted during the preparation of this report.

10. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An equalities impact assessment has been completed.

NOTE: The background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) which were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report are:

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980
The Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020

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