

Meeting: Education Advisory Board

Subject: Response to Covid-19

Date: 14th October 2020

Report from: Alison Jeffery, Director of Children, Families and Education

Report by: Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director, Education

1. Purpose of report

1.1 This report sets out details of the work and ongoing work that has, and is continuing to be undertaken, by the council and partners to support education settings in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that members of the Education Advisory Board note the actions that have been taken over the past six months by the council and partners to respond to the pandemic and the ongoing work that is in place in order to continue to support education settings.

3. The initial response to the pandemic

3.1 Following the decision by the government to close education settings from 23rd March 2020 the council worked closely with partners to agree and quickly put into place a response that would support education settings and protect and safeguard vulnerable learners. The initial response is set out below in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.7:

3.2 A **Covid-19 working group** was established and chaired by the Deputy Director. This included a broad range of education leaders from schools, colleges, Multi Academy Trusts and early years settings as well as council officers and a representative from the Regional Schools Commissioner office. This group provided an important vehicle to consult on what was needed, agree priorities to focus on and to have oversight of the workstreams that followed and the actions that were being taken by each workstream. This was summarised in an overarching plan which was continually updated.

- 3.3 **Six workstreams** were quickly established, brief details of which are given below:
- **Infection control and health & safety** - chaired by the Director of Public Health. Weekly updates and guidance on infection control were provided to education settings and basic packages of PPE were delivered to all schools.
 - **Digital learning and home learning** - chaired by the seconded Ofsted inspector. The work supported the delivery of remote access to education and the preparations of a more comprehensive offer for the Autumn term exploiting the advantages of digital technology. A baseline survey was completed during the summer term to support this.
 - **Emotional health and wellbeing** - chaired by the PEP and Inclusion Manager. A range of resources were developed to support schools both in terms of the emotional health of pupils and staff.
 - **Safeguarding and vulnerable learners** - chaired by the Head of Service for Inclusion. Work included the deployment of the LA Link Co-ordinators details of which are given in paragraph 3.6
 - **Transition pre-school to key stage 2** - chaired by the Early Years Advisory Teacher.
 - **Transition key stage 2 to key stage 5** - chaired by the Post-16 Commissioning Manager. Work included the development of the Flying Start website and resources which supported the transition of Year 11 learners to post-16.
- 3.4 To ensure there were good **communications** between the council and headteachers, weekly virtual meetings were held with headteachers consisting of 3x primary heads (central, north and south), secondary heads and special school heads. Bi-weekly meetings were also held with CEOs of multi academy trusts and also with heads of LA maintained schools. In addition to meetings a daily email went out to all school leaders and partners providing key information and resources with links to dedicated pages on the PEP website
- 3.5 In addition to the workstreams and above communications, a weekly **'recovery and reset' reference group for early years settings** was established and business sustainability service (Hempsalls) was commissioned to support the market.
- 3.6 An early decision was also made to deploy **LA Link Co-ordinators to every school in the city to support the tracking and monitoring of vulnerable children and young people**, particularly those that were not accessing school, to ensure they and their families were getting the right support. A Children's Hub was established as part of the HIVE to provide support and help to families in need.
- 3.7 **LA Link Officers** were deployed to LA maintained schools in order to provide support and sign off health & safety checks, risk assessments

and plans for re-opening schools to specific year groups as required by government.

4. Preparing for the opening of schools to all year groups

- 4.1 During the summer, the council and partners worked hard to support schools to re-open to all year groups from September. A summary of the response is set out below in paragraphs 4.2 to 4.9:
- 4.2 Whilst the Covid-19 Working Group was stepped down a number of the **workstreams were retained** including: digital learning; infection control; emotional health & wellbeing; and safeguarding & vulnerable learners. This have now been merged into the PEP structures which are shown on page 4 of the new education strategy 2020 - 2023.
- 4.3 The **infection control and health & safety** group stepped up their work to pull together a package of support that included guidance, resources, flowcharts and template letters that schools could send out to parents to cover a range of scenarios where there was a positive case, outbreak, local lockdown, etc.
- 4.4 A **Welcome Back to School campaign** was launched over the summer in order to reassure parents and carers about their children returning to schools and to demonstrate that schools were doing everything that was necessary to make schools safe. The previous school attendance campaign 'Miss School Miss Out' is currently on hold and is likely to be relaunched after the October half term.
- 4.5 Alongside the Welcome Back to School campaign, a **Welcome Back toolkit and resources for schools** was produced and distributed. Similar versions were done for front line practitioners working with families and also a version for partner organisations.
- 4.6 The arrangements for **tracking and monitoring vulnerable children and young people** were continued but due to the fact services were being stood up again and those redeployed as LA Link Co-ordinators were having to return to their roles, a decision was made to recruit 3 full time Co-ordinators. All 3 posts will be filled by November 2020.
- 4.7 To further support vulnerable children and in particular those that might struggle to return to school, a template for **Welcome Back Plans** were distributed which many schools have used during the first few weeks of the Autumn term.
- 4.8 Also distributed ahead of the first week of term was a **Welcome Back to School wellbeing support package for schools** based on a similar package that was developed in Medway.

- 4.9 The arrangements that were in place during the summer term to support **communications** continued into the Autumn term but on a less frequent basis. Briefings for headteachers were held bi-weekly rather than every week and the daily communications were reduced to a weekly comms on a Friday. Bi-weekly meetings with MAT continued and briefings for LA maintained schools returned to half termly.