

CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

To: Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 23rd June 2020

From: Lou Williams: Service Director, Children and Safeguarding
Jonathan Lewis: Service Director, Education

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Outcome: The Council's response to COVID-19 and our strategies for county-wide recovery will have a significant impact on outcomes for individuals and communities.

This report provides an update on:

- the Council's ongoing response to the current Coronavirus pandemic;

Recommendation:

- a. note the progress made to date in responding to the impact of the Coronavirus.
- b. note the continuing commitment of leaders and staff across children's services and partner agencies to ensure that the needs of all children and young people continue to be met.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. This report provides updates relevant to this service committee on the Council's ongoing response to the coronavirus pandemic, our work with partners and communities to protect the most vulnerable and our developing work to help Cambridgeshire to recover from this unprecedented emergency.
- 1.2. COVID-19 continues to spread across the world and in the UK. At 4th June, there had been 6.3 million confirmed cases and more than 380,000 deaths globally, with 280,000 confirmed cases and nearly 40,000 deaths in the UK. Across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, 1,979 confirmed cases and 365 deaths occurred between 27th March and 15th May.
- 1.3. The Prime Minister addressed the nation on Sunday 10th May with a new message for the public to Stay Alert, Control the Virus and Save Lives. This was followed by publication on Monday 11th May of the Government's recovery strategy "OUR PLAN TO REBUILD". This has been followed by further guidance on schools, supporting the care sector and reopening of public spaces and town centres.
- 1.4. Officers and teams continue to work closely with our communities, partners and providers to develop appropriate operational responses to new guidance as it is issued. Further details of the Council's response in service committee COVID-19 update reports: [Council Meetings](#)
- 1.5. The Council Senior Leadership Team continues to run a 'Gold Command' Incident Management Team at least twice weekly to co-ordinate our response. The Local Resilience Forum (LRF), a partnership of local agencies, continues to hold a Strategic Co-ordinating Group at least twice weekly to co-ordinate the multi-agency response.
- 1.6. The Council's Recovery Framework was endorsed by General Purposes Committee on 14th May and a Recovery Board has been established, with the first meeting scheduled for 10th June. The Senior Management Team member chairing this board is the Director for Business Improvement and Development, Amanda Askham and all Executive Directors, Service Directors and Corporate Heads of Service are members of the recovery group.
- 1.7. The Local Resilience forum has also stood up a Recovery Coordinating Group to co-ordinate multi-agency actions. This group is jointly chaired by Huntingdon District Council Managing Director, Jo Lancaster and South Cambridgeshire District Council Chief Executive, Liz Watts.
- 1.8. The Council continues to operate all essential services, with staff working from home wherever possible. Some services remain partially closed in line with government guidance and social distancing measures and are offering online services where possible. Plans to safely and gradually reopen services are being developed with partners through the LRF Restoration Group. Household Waste and Recycling Centres, Primary Schools and Early Years Settings have reopened successfully with some restrictions, temporary guidelines and social distancing measures in place.

2. COMMITTEE UPDATES

Children & Safeguarding

- 2.1 In light of the changing position around Covid-19 and the easing of lock down, we have designed proposals about how some services might begin to re-open or change delivery models. This has included -
- Looking at how we can safely enable more direct face-to-face contact between children in care and their parents;
 - How we can start to hold hybrid meetings in respect of family and youth courts; child protection conferences; public law outline meetings; and some child in need (CIN) meetings;
 - Thinking about how we can ensure social distancing as some community services such as child and family centres begin to open in the coming months;
 - Thinking about how we support more of our staff begin to return and support those who remain in higher risk categories;
 - How we ensure that service users are able to access buildings safely as needed.
- 2.2 These plans have been developed carefully and in accordance with the developing guidance published by Government. Longer term recovery planning is underway with report due in mid-July. We will work with Ofsted (via a secondment) and the Eastern Region to review these plans and ensure their effectiveness.
- 2.3 Discussions around modelling work for future demand and projections of potential pressures on the system underway. As outlined in the previous committee, we are working with Education colleagues to utilise outdoor learning centre Grafham Water to support children in and on the edge of care. This arrangement will be reviewed in the summer.
- 2.4 Workforce availability steady in both authorities and recruitment has continued successfully. The ASYE (assessed and supported year in employment) recruitment assessment centre will be held at the end of June. This programme provides newly qualified social workers extra support during their first year of employment. Morale across the workforce remains very good and staff continue to go above and beyond to maintain contact with families and children

Education

- 2.5 In education, the last month has seen some significant change in government policy including
- The delay in reopening for all primary age pupils until September. Previously they have expected all pupils to return for a month before the end of term.
 - Confirmation that the current Year 10/12 pupils will sit their exams in the summer of 2021. Those pupils currently in year 11 and 13 have had locally assessed grades and have not sat exams.
 - Greater flexibility for Primary Headteachers to open spare capacity to pupils once demand has been met by critical workers, vulnerable pupils, reception, year 1 and year 6. No further funding is being provided to schools.
 - Secondary Headteachers have been given flexibility to consider inviting other year groups in for face to face meetings before the end of term as long as protective

measures remain and within number limits.

- Free School Meals will be provided to eligible families via vouchers over the summer holidays. Each family will receive £15 per week per child via the Edenred DfE scheme. We continue to encourage parents to apply for free school meals as a lot of families circumstances have changed.
- On the 19th June, the government announced details of a £1bn investment into catch up support for pupils in schools including group support and 1:1 tuition. No further details have been released. We expect a further announcement on a similar scheme for early years and post 16 / FE provision.
- That all pupils will return to schools in September.

2.6 Despite these announcements, government guidance has often taken some time to follow and currently we are still concerned about the following areas -

- We are not clear on government expectation for assessment in the next academic year. There is a proposed new baseline assessment for early years from September. There has been no announcement of the intention for either phonics or SATS and the expectation for the GCSE and A-Levels in light of the significant gap in learning.
- No guidance for September opening including whether protective measures needs to continue. Time is needed for planning.
- The government advice continues to be that unless bubbles can be maintained before and after school clubs should not operate. This creates a significant risk for summer holiday clubs which may cause further issues for critical worker families. The scientific evidence continues to be reviewed to support further opening of childcare.

2.7 We have seen share increased in children accessing Early Years provision with the position on the 18th June outlined below –

	Childminders		Early Years		Overall Children (4 th June in brackets)
	Number	% Open	Number	% Open	
Cambridgeshire	332	56%	268	76%	2,854 (1,804)

2.8 The amount of children accessing schools continues to increase. In his speech on the 8th June 2020, the Secretary of State outlined that 70% of schools had opened to additional pupils (core year groups). This figure was 95.5% in Cambridgeshire. The position on the 8th June is below –

Cambridgeshire	Normal headcount	Headcount attending	Proportion
Total primary schools	198	195	98.5%
Primary schools open to core year groups	198	189	95.5%
Children on roll at primary schools (inc. nursery aged)	49911	10466	21.0%
Primary school aged children on roll in core year groups at primary schools (Reception to year 6)	20179	7187	35.6%
Core year groups			
Reception	6763	2540	37.6%
Year 1	6709	2192	32.7%
Year 6	6707	2455	36.6%

- 2.9 By the 11th June 2020, the total number of pupils attending schools had risen to 17,603 and this peaked at 21,622 on the 16th June. Numbers of vulnerable pupils in school have doubled since May. Many of our school have gone to extraordinary efforts to open and have filled all capacity they have – the main challenge to further opening is the availability of staff. This has led to challenges from parents with more critical worker staff wishing to return.
- 2.10 Secondary Schools opened to further pupils from year 10 and year 12 on the 15th June. The majority of secondary schools will open for pupils at some point (typically one day and week) and will support some teacher for core and practical subjects. The majority (75%) intend providing some online teaching via Zoom/Teams.
- 2.11 We continue to monitor Public Health data and we have advised schools is to follow their existing plans and use their risk assessments to open more places cautiously. This will be reviewed at the start of July. Test and Trace processes are working effectively and we continue to support schools with decisions on opening.
- 2.12 Whilst we wait for clear guidance on the future, we have been developing a primary recovery curriculum and getting ready for restarting in September. Twice weekly meetings are being held with the Department for Education. The current uncertainty is challenging for everyone in education and we continue to be concerned around the stress and anxiety in schools and settings and we are continue to provide support where we can to leaders.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The second return to MHCLG accounting for spending and financial consequences resulting from the pandemic was submitted by the Council on 15 May 2020. This second return required significantly more detail than the first request from central government, such as the inclusion of actual expenditure figures for April, a specific projection for May and then for the remainder of financial year. We were also asked for information relating to cashflow and levels of reserves. The Council participated in work organised by the Society of County Treasurers and the County Councils Network to aid interpretation of the guidance to ensure greater consistency between individual Council returns.
- 3.2 The latest projected financial impacts for this committee are as follows:

		<i>Headline full-year estimates for this Committee submitted to MHCLG in June 2020 £000</i>					
Commitments to end of May	Committee name	New commitments	Income forgone	Impaired savings	Gross Total	Specified funding	Net Total
£1,099	CYP	£6,107	£1,832	£1,436	£9,375	-£8	£9,367

Please note: The figures above exclude any potential Covid-19 related costs associated with spend on Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budgets.

3.3 The financial consequences within the remit of this Committee include:

- Potential increase in staff costs resulting from an increase in the number of referrals leading to the need for assessments and longer term working with families within both early help and children's social care;
- Risks that some or all of anticipated savings targets in respect of budgets associated with children in care placement costs will not be achieved. This is because we expect a continuing placement shortage, meaning that unit costs are likely to increase. The effective launch of the Family Safeguarding approach in children's services has also been affected by Covid-19, with challenges in respect of recruiting and training adult practitioners. Family Safeguarding is associated with lower numbers of children in care, and delayed full implementation of the approach may mean that numbers in care do not fall as expected over the remainder of this financial year.

3.4 Business cases covering the above areas have or are being developed. Proposals will be presented at the July meeting of the General Purposes Committee (GPC) at which GPC will be asked to approve any necessary budget revisions or grant allocations to support the identified pressures at this stage.

4. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

4.1 The current Coronavirus pandemic will have both an immediate and a longer term effect on all of the Council's priorities. The impacts will be monitored and managed through our risk logs and recovery plans and will feed into the annual review of Council strategy.

5. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Following the Government's recovery plans for the UK, it is important for people to get back to school and work, for communities and services to rebuild and for businesses to reopen. As a Council, we will need to carefully interpret guidance as it comes through from central government, and work with partners and communities to ensure that we restart Cambridgeshire at the right time and pace and only when it is safe to do so.

5.2 The Council's financial forecasts have changed dramatically since a balanced budget was set in February 2020. Whilst it is too early to predict the full financial impact of fighting COVID-19, we know that we need to continue lobbying government for further funding and maintain strong financial management if we are to emerge from this period with the financial stability we had achieved pre Covid-19.

Implications	Officer Clearance
Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?	
Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement?	
Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or LGSS Law?	
Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?	
Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?	
Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact?	
Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health	

Source Documents	Location
None	