

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>The Response of Schools to Covid 19.</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>8 March 2021</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Executive Director Families, Children and Learning</b>
<b>Contact Officer: Name:</b>	<b>Mark Storey</b>
<b>Email:</b>	<b>Mark.Storey@brighton-hove.gov.uk</b>
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>

## **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline how the council, schools and other providers' response to the pandemic is proceeding, whether it is succeeding and what could be done better. It will update the committee on the efforts to ensure our most vulnerable children are getting fed, whether digital devices to support home learning are getting through to all who need them and what is being done to support pupils whose home situation is not conducive to remote learning.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the committee notes the information in this report.

## **3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 On the 2nd January 2021, schools in the city of Brighton and Hove were advised by the council to postpone opening fully after the 2020 Christmas holiday due to the rising number of infections from Covid-19 within the city.

- 3.2 Two days later, the Government made the announcement that, "primary schools, secondary schools and colleges across England must move to remote provision from tomorrow [Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January] except for vulnerable children and the children of key workers."

### **3.3 Food provision for disadvantaged pupils**

- 3.3.1 Since the start of the spring term 2021 all adults and children in school are being provided with a hot meal. This is to alleviate any pressures on families where critical workers are continuing to support the response to the pandemic, maintain the universal infant free school meal and to support the catering service in the face of significant pressures for the contractor, Caterlink. At the time of writing this report there is no supplier relief but the council is operating in the spirit of the previous arrangement when the initial restrictions on pupils attending school were put in place.

- 3.3.2 All children entitled to free school meals, but not attending school, are now receiving a supermarket food voucher. Whilst the government scheme, via Edenred, only started on 18 January 2021 the council had facilitated schools to distribute vouchers using the provider, Huggg, since the start of the spring term.

Huggg have supported the distribution of vouchers under the Covid Winter Grant detailed further in the report.

- 3.3.3 Prior to the government's confirmation that schools can claim £15 funding for each child per week, the Council had requested schools distribute a £10 voucher for the first two weeks of the spring term. This was revised and a backdated voucher provided to families in line with the government's advice.
- 3.3.4 The Council was awarded £0.865m Covid Winter Grant to ensure vulnerable people and families are warm and well fed this winter. During the Christmas holidays the council distributed supermarket food vouchers to the value of £25 per child, per week, to families whose children qualify for free childcare places for two-year olds, Early Years Pupil Premium and using the children centres' food bank as well as those entitled to free school meals in schools and colleges. In addition, it was estimated that there were another 400 children and young people who could be expected to be supported through the grant. This includes young people in sixth form settings and children who are now being electively home educated.
- 3.3.5 This supermarket food voucher distribution scheme will be repeated during the February half term and is estimated to cost £0.678m in total.
- 3.3.6 The way in which the remaining grant is being distributed was outlined in the recent [report](#) to the Policy & Resources Committee on 21 January 2021. An allocation of £0.09m is being provided to organisations who work specific groups in the city and through a small grant scheme for projects working in Brighton and Hove to help ensure that vulnerable people and families are warm and well fed this winter.
- 3.3.7 All education settings are encouraged to identify any families in need of support and to either refer them through the Winter Food Grant scheme or the city's existing food distribution network. Families with no recourse to public funds are currently entitled to Free School Meals in line with the government's advice.

#### **3.4 Remote Learning**

- 3.4.1 Remote learning is a broad term encompassing any learning that happens outside of the classroom, with the teacher not present in the same location as the pupils. It includes learning delivered through digital technologies (learning platforms, live or recorded lessons, links to videos, websites, TV) and written or paper-based tasks.
- 3.4.2 Currently approximately 27,500 children and young people are involved in home learning. In the last 6 months the council has produced guidance, commissioned Sussex Coast Teaching School Alliance to deliver training and supported schools to improve home learning. Throughout lockdown, the Education and Skills team and school Partnership Advisors will continue to provide support and guidance to schools as they develop their remote learning provision. Schools have also been very supportive of one another.
- 3.4.3 Schools are keeping parents updated with their expectations for home learning providing information on: curriculum content; expectations for time to be spent on

learning ([based on DfE guidance](#)) and tasks to be completed; how to access remote learning (online or other); how feedback will be given and what additional support is needed for pupils with particular needs.

[What's working well in remote education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

- 3.4.4 School themselves have worked hard over the last term to improve their home learning offer. They are becoming increasingly skilled at aligning their remote learning to the classroom curriculum. During this lockdown, schools are more carefully sequencing tasks and ensuring pupils obtain the building blocks they need to move on to the next step. Curricular goals are being made as explicit remotely as they would be in the classroom.
- 3.4.5 Based on reflections from lockdown 1, schools are maintaining contact with their remote pupils through videos, feedback messages and phone calls and are replicating a community feel through virtual assemblies and other communal events. They are also mindful of the impact on remote learning on pupil's emotional, social, and physical well-being and are including activities to help young people remain positive and healthy.
- 3.4.6 All remote learning is being offered alongside a classroom curriculum for pupils attending school. School leaders have been resilient and creative overcoming challenges around staff capacity and the need to provide learning using both face to face and remote strategies.
- 3.4.7 All schools are aware that remote learning places an additional burden on families that are working from home. Support they are providing can be very bespoke to individual circumstances.
- 3.4.8 School leaders are best placed to determine the content of any remote or online learning, linked to each setting's unique curriculum. Therefore, we advise parents to liaise closely with their school and discuss any issues that they are experiencing with them.
- 3.4.9 Remote learning evolves with each week of term as school staff become more skilled in its provision and in response to audits with key stakeholders. The type of activities offered include (but are not limited to): synchronous and asynchronous lessons; guided reading sessions; song of the week; class/year/school assemblies, well-being activities (Well-being Wednesday or Feel-good-Friday); digital-detox days; creative projects and physical activity challenges.

### 3.5 **Digital Devices**

- 3.5.1 The DfE have provided digital devices to disadvantaged pupils since the start of lockdown 1. During the summer term 2020, the city received 1,678 devices through the local authority initially for pupils with a social worker. From the autumn term onwards, schools ordered directly from the DfE. Allocations are based on free school meals data and an estimate of the number of devices a school already has. Schools are able to query their allocation and several settings have obtained additional devices in this way. Once all these orders have been fulfilled, the city will have received a minimum of 4,144 devices from this commitment, bringing the total number of devices received to over 5,800. The

local authority has advised schools when and how to place orders and checked all schools have ordered their full allocation.

3.5.3 Schools have also supported pupils accessing digital devices remotely through the purchase of devices, by loaning existing school equipment and asking their school community for donations.

3.5.4 Schools and families have also reached out to organisations that provide reconditioned devices for use by pupils. The *BBC Make a Difference: donate a laptop* campaign supported Business2Schools which links businesses and individuals with schools in their area that are accepting donations. Locally, TechTakeback are working with Brighton & Hove City Council to help children from digitally deprived families continue their education from home. Other charities have provided support directly for schools. Any individual / business wishing to donate should contact:

[Tech-Takeback - Circular Solutions for Tech Reuse & Recycling - Home](#)

3.5.5 In January a survey of primary and secondary schools was undertaken. Based on the survey results, over 90% of disadvantaged secondary and 80% of disadvantaged primary pupils have access to the equipment they need to learn remotely. Note these figures may change rapidly as schools find their own solutions. We also know that maintaining access is a challenge for all schools.

3.5.6 Schools and Ofsted both report that pupils tend to spend longer accessing a remote lesson when they are using a laptop than when using a phone (tablets are in between). Schools have thought carefully about whether pupils have access to the right kind of device when using digital remote education. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/whats-working-well-in-remote-education/whats-working-well-in-remote-education>

3.5.7 As more learning content is moved online and live or recorded lessons become more widely used, an increasing number of schools are reporting that families are struggling with data to access digital content. The DfE are working with network providers to increase data allowances and some educational sites, for example Oak Academy, are excluded from data charges.

3.5.8 Limitations to internet access means some students have struggled to access remote digital learning particularly live lessons.

### 3.6 Pupils engaging in home learning

3.6.1 There can be a range of reasons that pupils cannot always access remote learning in the way that we would want. Suitable devices can still be an issue but also: ability to be able to use equipment given; data limitations; wifi connection quality and/or access to an appropriate workspace. Very bespoke solutions are being found for hundreds of individual children and young people. Schools are reporting spending a long time on the phone supporting individual families to get working access. Schools are reporting that many children and young people struggle to engage with home learning.

3.6.2 The DfE have included, “those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)”

to their list of vulnerable children and young people who are currently able to attend school or college. [Children of critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk) In some instances, this has been a positive tool to encourage hard to reach pupils into schools. However, for some schools this has resulted in a significant increase in pupils attending school which has placed an additional strain on limited resources.

- 3.6.3 If the pupil lacks access to a digital device but continues to learn remotely, schools have ensured their students can access learning through the provision of paper-based activities and stationary which is either collected from the school or delivered to the pupil's home.
- 3.6.4 When using remote learning, some content is delivered more effectively through worksheets or a textbook. However, when using textbooks or worksheets it is still important to make sure that teachers can provide feedback and assess learning.
- 3.6.5 For pupils without digital connectivity, schools have developed rigorous systems to contact students to ensure: pupils still feel connected to school; to increase engagement; to provide feedback on learning and for safeguarding purposes.
- 3.6.6 Much emphasis has previously been placed on the lack of resources at home, especially digital technology, for pupils to fully access and participate in remote education. However, parents' responses to a YouGov questionnaire highlight that their children's motivation is of greater concern to them. The data highlights that 11% of parents saw access to an appropriate device as a challenge, compared to 40% who responded their child's focus on studying was a worry. [Remote education research - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk) This is also being noticed by schools in the city.
- 3.6.7 To raise engagement, schools are utilising staff to contact pupils and parents. This can be by phone or facilitated through the interaction tools within a learning platform. Schools report that although these strategies can be effective, they are resource heavy.
- 3.6.8 The EMAS service supports families for whom English is an additional language. They report a high proportion of their families are without access to digital devices. Many of these families are high on the vulnerability index with 30% living in the most deprived areas.
- 3.6.9 The EMAS service are working remotely with families to help them become digitally connected. This includes supporting them to complete school technology audits; upskilling families to use educational platforms; supporting families unfamiliar with the English education system and helping students acquire academic English required for assessments.
- 3.6.10 The DfE are working with network providers to increase data allowances and some educational sites are to be excluded from data charges. Schools can apply for extra data on behalf of families who meet all three of these criteria: do not have fixed broadband at home; cannot afford additional data for their devices and are experiencing disruption to their face-to-face education

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 The council, schools and other providers are working hard to ensure our most vulnerable children are getting food and access to high quality remote learning.

#### **5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

##### Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The council will continue to work with schools and other providers to understand the additional costs relating to Covid-19. The council will also strive to ensure all available funding sources are communicated to schools, and accessed to mitigate additional costs.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Steve Williams      Date: 22/01/21*

##### Legal Implications:

- 6.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

*Lawyer Consulted: Serena Kynaston      Date: 11/02/2021*