East Lothian
Council

REPORT TO: Education Committee

MEETING DATE: 17 November 2020

BY: Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services)

SUBJECT: COVID-19 – Update on the Ongoing Operation of Schools and Impact of COVID-19 on Session 2020/2021

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To provide the Committee with an update on the reopening of schools for session 2020/2021 and the ongoing mitigations in place to ensure the health and safety of all children, young people and staff.

1.2 To provide an update on the systems and processes in place for dealing with positive COVID-19 cases in schools and new guidance issued by the Scottish Government on 30 October 2020.

1.3 To provide an update on the impact of the pandemic on the wider Education service.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

i. Note the steps being taken by the Education Service and schools in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, including the ongoing mitigations in place to ensure the health and safety of all children, young people and staff.

ii. Note the systems and processes in place for dealing with positive COVID-19 cases in schools.

iii. Note the impact of the pandemic on the wider Education Service.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Towards the end of July 2020, the Depute First Minister announced that, following the period of lockdown through the COVID pandemic and the

subsequent closure of all schools throughout the last term of session 2019/20, all local authorities and schools should prepare to reopen schools for the new school session, from 11 August 2020. In East Lothian, the new school session commenced with two in-service days for staff on the 10 and 11 August with children and young people starting on 12 August 2020. This was one week earlier than the intended start of the new school session.

3.2   Planning for the reopening of schools was well underway both before and during the summer break. The Education Steering Group was realigned as an Education Recovery Group and has representation from across relevant Council service areas, from Head Teachers and from the Trade Unions. The group has had oversight of the development of any necessary operational guidance based on the guidance issued by the Scottish Government. The group has continued to meet throughout term 1 of session 2020/2021.

3.3   All schools across East Lothian have fully implemented the requirements of the Scottish Government. This has included ensuring the appropriate risk assessments are in place and that they are regularly updated, appropriate physical distancing between adults and between adults and children is in place and consideration of measures to support those children and young people who are more vulnerable. We have in place enhanced hygiene measures, including enhanced cleaning, hand sanitisation, wiping down of desks during the day and appropriate use of PPE including the wearing of face coverings by pupils and staff as required.

3.5   **COVID-19 and protocols for dealing with positive cases in East Lothian schools**

3.5.1   Infection rates continue to rise across Scotland and the Scottish Government continue to apply further restrictions. On 29 October 2020, the First Minister announced that East Lothian Council would be placed in **tier 3** of the Scottish Government Strategic Framework. Updated guidance on *reducing the risks of COVID 19 in schools* was published on 30 October 2020 which provides further measures to be put in place by local authorities and schools and enhanced mitigations for those in tiers 3 and 4. Local Authorities and schools have been asked to implement this new guidance from Monday 2 November 2020. The Head of Education and Children's Services has written to parents and carers to provide them with a further update on the new guidance.

3.5.2   The NHS Health Protection Teams (HPT) routinely scrutinise school mitigations in place and to date have provided positive feedback in respect of the ways in which schools across East Lothian, are implementing the guidance and ensuring the risk to ongoing transmission is reduced. Notification of a positive case tends to come from the parent/carer or staff member to the Head Teacher of the school. There can be a delay in the timing of when our schools are notified about a positive case and the information reaching the HPT. Through working together on the positive

cases thus far, we have put in place new systems and protocols that ensure the Head Teacher and staff can progress the risk assessment process and avoid any delay in identifying close contacts of the positive case. The Education Service and Communications team have also worked closely with the NHS HPT to better understand the communications requirements and to streamline systems and processes for informing parents timeously of a positive case. The Education Service and school is very limited in terms of the information that can be disclosed about a positive case and where there are staff or pupils identified as a close contact. This is in order to protect patient confidentiality.

3.5.3 The Education Service and schools have continued to update and improve our approaches to blended learning. This takes account of the need for schools to provide learning for any child or young person identified as a close contact and who needs to self-isolate, to ensure that their education can continue. It also ensures that we are prepared for any possible future local or national restrictions where either a partial or full return to blended learning may be needed. In addition, the Education Service and all schools regularly update Business Continuity Plans to ensure that we are well prepared in the event of a change to the current situation.

3.5.4 East Lothian Council received £401,000 of capital funding and £69,000 of revenue funding to support provision of digital devices for children and young people as part of the Connecting Scotland initiative. This has enabled us to purchase 1,407 Chromebooks to date, which will be distributed to pupils according to free school meal entitlement, those who are care experienced and those with siblings where there is only one device in the family. In addition, we have also purchased 400 Mifi devices to support children's connectivity to the Internet. The additional devices will be invaluable in supporting children and young people to engage in learning both within the classroom and at home. Our IT service will also be providing additional laptops that will ensure that all teachers have access to a laptop for use in school and at home as required.

3.6 **Conclusion and ongoing challenges of response**

3.6.1 There is no doubt that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the more recent resurgence of rates of the virus has had a significant impact on the work and workload of schools and on the wider Education Service. Our staff have risen to the challenge admirably, putting the health and wellbeing of our children, young people and staff at the heart of their work. However, the ongoing impact of this pandemic cannot be underestimated. We continue to be strongly committed to maintaining a relentless focus on improving outcomes for all children and young people through the core business of learning and teaching and raising attainment. The Scottish Government has encouraged all local authorities and schools to streamline plans for this year in recognition of the many additional pressures. As a result, we have worked with schools to support them in refining their improvement plans to ensure our work is achievable and manageable. We will continue to keep this under close review in the coming months.

3.6.2 We continue to build on our earlier successes in communication and engaging with staff, parents/carers and communities. Regular school and local authority communications are in place and have been very well received. In addition, our work on social media has received positive feedback and continues to ensure our stakeholders have the information they need when they need it. The Head of Education and Children's Services and Education Management Team also meet regularly with the East Lothian Association of Parent Council Members to provide updates and to answer any questions they have.

4   POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1   None

5   INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1   Equalities – the impact of COVID-19 has had and continues to have an impact on the wellbeing and learning of children, families and communities. Work continues to seek to mitigate this impact in all schools.

6   RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1   Financial – The Scottish Government has provided some funding to support the re-opening of schools including an initial £20m national funding, and a national £50m which is split across the academic year to support new Teachers and support staff. A national £30m to support the re-opening of schools remains unallocated and will be subject to demonstration of need. In addition, the Scottish Government has indicated that local authorities should use all of available resource available including providing flexibility to divert any discretionary funding including Scottish Attainment Challenge funding, Pupil Equity Funding and Grant funding for the implementation of the expansion of early learning and childcare to 1140 hours. As well as the additional costs of teaching and support staff, there are also indications that there will be significant pressures in cleaning and school transport with costs in excess of available resources. This remains subject to change and work is ongoing to confirm the level of additional costs being incurred.

6.2   Personnel – Funding for additional staffing for schools has been allocated by Scottish Government to compensate for any loss of learning suffered by pupils during the COVID-19 lockdown. We have appointed 14 teachers (6 Primary and 8 Secondary) on a temporary contract until the end of this school session to provide additionality in our schools. We are currently undertaking a recruitment campaign to appoint an additional 22 teachers (18 Primary and 4 Secondary) to further enhance this in-school additionality. These additional teachers will be in place until the end of the current school session, June 2021. Additional staff have also been

required in Facilities Management to ensure adequate cleaning and catering for schools.

6.3   Other – none.

7   BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1   Scottish Government Strategic Framework. Updated guidance on *reducing the risks of COVID 19 in schools* https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-reducing-the-risks-in-schools/

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