

**MINUTE**  
**of**  
**EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am on 11 June 2020.**

**Present:**

Councillor Paul O’Kane (Chair)	Councillor Jim McLean
Councillor Colm Merrick (Vice Chair)	Councillor Gordon Wallace
Councillor Caroline Bamforth	Dr Frank Angell
Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)	Ms Dorothy Graham
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	Ms Mary McIntyre
Councillor Alan Lafferty	Mr Des Morris

Councillor O’Kane in the Chair

**Attending:**

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Mhairi Shaw, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Fiona Morrison, Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources); Mark Ratter, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance); Mary Docherty, Education Resources Senior Manager; Graeme Hay, Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change); Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager; and Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer.

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**1262.** There were no declarations of interest intimated.

**COVID-19 LOCAL DELIVERY PHASING PLAN**

**1263.** The committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking endorsement for the Education Department’s COVID-19 Local Delivery Phasing Plan, following publication of the Scottish Government’s Route Map on 21 May 2020 and Coronavirus (COVID-19): Reopening of Schools Guidance. A copy of the plan accompanied the report.

The report outlined the background to the current circumstances following the closure of all schools and early years’ settings on 20 March. Scottish Government guidance had required local education authorities to continue to ensure educational provision for specific pupil groups including the children of certain identified key workers and those children deemed to be vulnerable or at risk of becoming so. The Council had continued to provide this emergency provision through 6 geographical hubs in communities across the authority which pupils had been able to access. In addition, Isobel Mair School had continued to support pupils and families throughout this period. Following on from the publication of the Scottish Government’s Route Map out of lockdown published on 21 May, a strategic framework had been produced to support local authorities with their own approaches to a phased reopening

of schools and early years' settings. Further and more detailed guidance from the Scottish Government had been published on 29 May and this would support the department and schools to prepare their recovery and action plans, provide details which would support the reopening of facilities, and guidance on the completion of risk assessments amongst other things. The guidance was subject to change and consequently the department and school plans would be continually reviewed and updated as the service moved through the phases of the relaxation of lockdown.

The report went on to explain that the Local Delivery Phasing Plan (the plan) set out the agreed principles underpinning the department's approach to recovery and the establishment of a local Education Recovery Group comprising senior officers, head teachers from all sectors, and Trade Union representatives to support the department's scenario planning and considerations for recovery. The plan set out the phased recovery approach being adopted locally consisting of 4 phases. Phase 1 saw schools and centres reopening in early June to an increased number of children and young people for transition purposes with Phase 2 set for 11 August with schools and centres opening for all staff with pupils attending on a part-time basis with a blended model of in-school and out-of-school learning. Phase 3 would involve schools and centres incrementally increasing the number of hours pupils spend in schools while reducing out of school learning; then eventually, in Phase 4, fully reopening to all pupils. Phases 3 and 4 would be implemented when it was safe to do so as informed by the Scottish Government.

The report concluded by explaining that throughout the period of lockdown free school meal provision had continued through the delivery of food bags to families entitled to this benefit. This model had been well received by recipients with approximately 1,350 parcels being delivered on a weekly basis. It was proposed that this scheme would continue to support families for the foreseeable future and the Council was working closely with the Scottish Government to secure this. The importance of maintaining good communication with parents and carers was crucial and this was recognised in the department's approach. The Director had written to all parents and carers and the Convener had chaired a virtual meeting of Parent Council chairs to consult with them on the plan. Many individual schools had met remotely with Parent Councils and would continue to consult with staff, pupils, parents and carers on their individual recovery plans.

Councillor O'Kane, supported by the Director, reported that the recent meeting with Parent Council chairs had been very well attended and had resulted in approximately 600 questions grouped around a number of common themes. There had been considerable discussion around recovery plans and those who had participated in the meeting had been generally supportive of the approach being taken.

Responding to Councillor Wallace who raised the issue of vulnerable children potentially falling behind in their studies and the quality of online teaching materials, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) confirmed that vulnerable children had been specifically targeted in terms of continued face-to-face access to teachers through the hub schools. Initial numbers attending the hubs had been relatively low but through engagement with the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and the Educational Psychology Service both tracking the engagement of this group, the numbers attending had increased steadily and now totalled more than 120 children and young people. The number had increased sharply since the closure of the hubs and the transfer of children back to their own schools. The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) outlined the wide range of online resources available to schools and explained that the department was engaging with a number of specialist organisations and teachers in the field of online teaching through co-operation with the West Partnership, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), and the University of Glasgow, with a view to further

increasing the availability of resources and equipping teachers with the appropriate skills to develop and deliver online teaching. He also reported that over 90% of children and young people were regularly engaging with online learning.

The Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change) reported that over the past 3 years and prior to lockdown, more than 2000 digital devices had been provided by the department to disadvantaged children and young people along with a number of mobile wi-fi devices and that a further bid had been submitted to the Scottish Government to allow the purchase of even more equipment.

Mr Morris commended the hard work of all teachers during this extremely difficult period, commended the department for its ongoing support to teachers, and welcomed that the EIS was involved in the Education Recovery Group.

Councillor Buchanan added his thanks to the Director and all of her staff for the tremendous work which had been undertaken since March and made particular reference to the partnership working between the department and colleagues in the HSCP and the Environment Department. Recognising that major obstacles remained to be overcome, he expressed the view that the Council was in a strong position to quickly recover from this crisis and that previous capital investment in digital technology and infrastructure in schools stood the Council in good stead.

Having heard the Director explain that a blended approach involving both time in-school and online learning at home could constitute the “new normal” for some time to come, the committee agreed to endorse the Local Delivery Phasing Plan and the production of individual recovery plans for each school and early years setting.

## **PROGRESS ON PROVIDING THE SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY WITH ESTIMATES AS PART OF THE 2020 CERTIFICATION PROCESS**

**1264.** The committee considered a report by the Director of Education updating members on the progress made with providing the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) with estimated grades as part of the 2020 certification process.

The report explained that following the Scottish Government’s decision to close schools from 20 March, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills had announced that for the first time in history, there would be no examination diet in 2020. As a result, the SQA had been asked to put in place an alternative certification model that would ensure that young people in schools and colleges who were unable to sit examinations would not be disadvantaged in any way. The SQA had subsequently set out arrangements for an alternative certification model based on teachers providing refined estimated bands and rankings for each learner entered at National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher stages. The model for certification would be based on the 3 broad principles of fairness to all learners; safe and secure certification of qualifications, following the latest public health advice; and maintaining the integrity and credibility of the qualification system, ensuring that standards were maintained over time in the interest of learners.

It went on to explain that to support the provision of these refined estimates, schools had made use of previous estimate data, analysis of presentation levels and awards over the past 3 years, and prior learner attainment where this was available in S5 and S6. Schools had been supported in this process by the Quality Improvement Officer (QIO) team and the very effective systems already in place for analysing attainment, benchmarking, target setting, and tracking pupils. All of this was crucial in ensuring the integrity and credibility of

the results in 2020. It was further explained that following submission of the learner estimates, the SQA would moderate the information with results being issued individually to learners by 4 August.

The report concluded by explaining that schools had put in place a rigorous, evidence-based process to produce in excess of 19,000 SQA estimates for 2020. This had been hugely demanding for staff. However, as a result of the processes that staff had undertaken, their skills in assessment, and their knowledge of learners, the department was confident that schools had done their utmost to ensure that the hard work of all young people had been rightly and fairly recognised.

Responding to Councillor Wallace who sought clarification on how East Renfrewshire pupils actually achieved in previous SQA examinations compared to the estimates for the previous 3 year period, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that the schools usually submit estimates to SQA. This year, SQA asked schools to submit estimates based on candidates demonstrated and inferred attainment. It was noted that ERC schools had historical data which demonstrated a significant increase from the prelims to the final examinations in the proportion of pupils achieving key school measures.

Councillor Buchanan, supported by Councillor Merrick, expressed the view that this was an extremely worrying time for both pupils and their parents and expressed thanks to teachers and other Education Department staff for the considerable amount of work they had put in to producing more than 19,000 estimates within a very short period of time. However, he also expressed the view that the work done this year could stand the department in good stead for next year as it was anticipated that a similar process may be required if examinations were again affected as a result of schools trying to catch up on lost teaching time. A decision on the 2021 examination diet was expected from the Scottish Government sometime in August.

Having heard Councillor O’Kane express his thanks to teachers and the departmental leadership team for their considerable efforts in completing this considerable piece of work within a very demanding timescale, the committee agreed to note the Education Department’s progress in providing the SQA with estimates as part of the 2020 certification process.

## **EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE PROVISION FROM AUGUST 2020**

**1265.** The committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval of the statutory offer of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in all East Renfrewshire settings from August 2020 in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report explained that the Scottish Government had set a transformational agenda for ELC by 2020 which had been published in March 2017. The vision had been to almost double entitlement to free ELC from 600 to 1140 hours per year by August 2020 for all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds and was underpinned by the key principles of Quality, Flexibility, Accessibility, and Affordability. In September 2017 the Education Committee had approved East Renfrewshire’s expansion plan including the 1140 hours models of delivery for ELC. The Council had a reputation for providing high quality ELC which was flexible, affordable, and accessible to all families in their local community. Families had valued this model over the years and the expansion plan had built upon these principles. Subsequent reports had been submitted to the committee outlining ongoing progress. The most recent report in January 2020 had detailed the good progress the Council had made towards full implementation of 1140 hours of ELC with 4 key workstreams relating to Quality, Workforce, Delivery Models, and Infrastructure being on track to deliver this transformational agenda for local children and families from August 2020.

Referring to the delays in completing the major infrastructure programme required to fully deliver the Council's agreed delivery plan, the Director clarified that until such time as these works could be completed, it was anticipated that some children would have to be accommodated in alternative locations but that it was hoped that this would still be within their own local communities. For example, children previously accommodated at Crookfur Primary School and who were due to relocate to the new Crookfur Family Centre in order to free up space for catchment pupils at the school, would be accommodated at some other temporary location within Newton Mearns and would move, along with the relevant staff, to the new family centre once the building was completed. She also explained that further guidance on the re-opening of ELC facilities was expected to be issued by the Scottish Government within the following few days and that everything possible would be done to ensure that this vital service recovered as quickly as possible whilst taking account of this guidance and the related public health imperatives which remained in force.

Responding to Councillor Bamforth who sought clarification on whether or not places previously located at Crookfur Primary School would be reallocated across the local community once the new facility at Crookfur Family Centre was completed, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that this was unlikely as it was proposed that staff would move with the children to the new facility.

Councillor Buchanan, supported by Councillor Wallace, welcomed the decision to continue to work towards delivering 1140 hours of ELC in spite of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and recognised the amount of work that this had involved for the department and many partners across the Council. He continued by expressing the view that this would be welcomed by many parents as it would allow them to plan to get back to some form of normality albeit with possibly major changes to previous working patterns as a result of the restrictions imposed by public health guidance which were expected to remain in place for some considerable time yet. He concluded by looking forward to seeing work to complete the Council's major investment on infrastructure to support this initiative restarting in the near future.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) homologate the Director of Education's decision to continue to progress with plans to deliver 1140 hours of ELC for all eligible 2, 3 and 4 year old children from August 2020; and
- (b) approve the allocation of ELC places based on 1140 hours, recognising however that whilst social distancing remains children and families will not be able to access this full amount given the impact of COVID-19 on nursery attendance patterns.

## **SCHOOL EXCURSIONS IMPACTED BY COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**1266.** The committee considered a report by the Director of Education apprising members of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school excursions and refunds to parents/carers from travel providers and/or the settlement of insurance claims.

The report explained that a result of the pandemic, numerous school excursions had been cancelled and, given the expected ongoing restrictions around physical distancing and non-essential travel, it was unclear when any school excursions/trips would be able to go ahead over the summer and during the forthcoming school session.

At the point of lockdown, excursions by schools across the authority had been at different stages in the payment process, both in terms of payments made to the Council by parents/carers, and also in respect of funds paid to travel providers by the Council.

The report explained that a number of parents/carers had been in touch with schools requesting reimbursement of funds for cancelled excursions and/or those excursions currently still planned but without confirmation that they would proceed.

Councillor Buchanan, in fully endorsing the report, expressed the view that the steps proposed were the right thing to do as it would be easier for the Council to correspond with the various 3<sup>rd</sup> parties involved such as travel providers and insurance companies than to leave this to individual parents/carers. He also expressed the view that early repayment of monies paid by parents/carers would go a considerable way to relieving financial pressure on families which might already be coping with reductions in their household income caused by the lockdown restrictions.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) note the impact of COVID-19 on school excursions and refunds for parents;
- (b) endorse the proposal by the department to action full refunds to parents/carers for all school excursions cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- (c) remit the proposal to the Emergencies Committee for a decision on the financial aspects.

CHAIR