



REPORT TO: MORAY COUNCIL EMERGENCY CABINET ON 21 MAY

SUBJECT: EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICES RESPONSE TO COVID 19

BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITUES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet of the services within the Education, Communities and Organisational Development portfolio that have been developed and delivered during the Covid 19 pandemic to provide the response to the incident or to ensure continuity of critical council services.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Emergency Cabinet following a decision of Moray Council on 25 March 2020 to temporarily suspend all delegations to committees as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (para 2 of the minute refers).

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **It is recommended that the Cabinet review and note the services within the Education, Communities and Organisational Development portfolio that have been developed and delivered during the Covid 19 pandemic to provide the response to the incident or to ensure continuity of critical council services.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic the council has had to take a range of measures to ensure that critical services continue to be delivered and to develop and deliver a number of new services in response to the emergency. This has had to be done at pace in a dynamic and changing environment.
- 3.2 In response to the COVID-19 pandemic services have been temporarily closed, redesigned so that they can continue to operate during lockdown and taking account of social distancing requirements, and new services developed to help support Moray's citizens during this period of uncertainty and challenge. This report provides an overview of the services that have been maintained, often very differently from normal and those that have been rapidly created.

Education Central Team

- 3.3 A covid service plan has been developed in order to plan strategically and put in place operational guidance during the period of school closures and to plan ahead for the eventual return to school attendance. The plan has been set out under the following headings: Responsive; Resilient; and Readiness to Improve.
- 3.4 The plan is an iterative document that will be continually updated and amended in line with guidance received and national and local expectations. A summary of the workstreams is provided below and the full plan is reported in a separate paper to this Emergency Cabinet.

Childcare Hubs

- 3.5 The hub provision is well established and demand on hubs has continued to grow over the course of their existence with increases across almost all hubs and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings as key workers require childcare. The current position is over 120 children in school hubs and between 50 and 60 for ELC settings. Guidance was shared in terms of what hub activities would look like including supporting children to access and work on the learning set by their home school. An electronic volunteer form has been used to gather information on volunteers for the hubs and hub coordinators continue to look at rotas to ensure that volunteers who are teachers can also support learners with remote learning activities. Additional hubs are not required at this time. Positive feedback has been received from key workers who are extremely grateful of this service at a difficult time for them and their families.

Severe and Complex Workstream (Childcare Hubs)

- 3.6 Childcare hubs are also providing services for children with severe and complex needs as described in more detail below (paras 3.18 to 3.21).

Educational Continuity – Term 4

- 3.7 As Schools returned after the Spring break, the early focus was on the well-being of pupils and staff and supporting the adjustment to remote learning and working. Feedback from Head Teachers over the course of the first weeks indicated that a vast amount of work had been undertaken to prepare for the new term and that staff had been upskilling to ensure that they could connect with each other and with pupils through digital means. It is important that schools maintain their unique context as well as staff being able to use whichever platform or methods that they are most comfortable with and have been trained in. Staff have been encouraged to monitor their working hours so that these are not exceeded while working at home and to be mindful of individual circumstances including caring and other responsibilities.
- 3.8 Examples of practice to date are:
- Focus on wellbeing of children and maintaining a balance in expectations for parents to support – national expectation is around 2 hours per day

- Focus on wellbeing, literacy, numeracy and Inter-Disciplinary Learning (IDL) projects
- Use of online resources such as class dojo, show my homework, Education City, seesaw, kahoot, purple mash
- Preparation and use of physical learning packs (many distributed in GDPR compliant way and also physically to doorstep)
- Delivery and team collaboration through Google classrooms/Teams
- Learning Grids posted on Monday, contact sheet to HT by Friday then follow up if not engaged
- Accessing resources via school website or parents through closed FB page
- Twitter challenges, daily quizzes
- Families getting physical packs including paper, pens, rulers, etc. to support this

3.9 Progress will continue to be monitored and national advice followed. The covid service plan sets out a wide range of work to be developed, some now well progressed and other actions to be delivered over the coming weeks to support a remote education service. For example, advice is being prepared for schools on expectations to ensure consistency; a wakelet (small website) has been developed with a wide range of resources available to support learning and teachers; and guidance has recently been issued to allow children access to ICT hardware to support remote learning.

Connect Workstream in Schools

3.10 Guidance has been developed for use by practitioners in schools on how to support our more vulnerable children and families. Vulnerable children and families were identified by schools to ensure that the needs of those of most concern continued to be met. Head teachers have reported that families are being supported in the following ways:

- Phoning/contacting all children over the course of the first week of term
- Using home school link worker, PSA, or other agency contacts, to support young person/family, as best suits situation
- Forming pupil staff groupings with specific staff allocated to particular families
- Using preferred contact of parents e.g. email, class dojo, teams – some of this 1:1
- Created “comfy” room on google classrooms for most vulnerable
- Assessed children into 1-4 as per connect guidance to ensure appropriate support
- Daily check-ins by class teacher in variety of ways
- School newsletter and daily quiz or challenge to engage children
- Taken learning packs to doorsteps to make contact with families

3.11 Cases are referred into the Multi Agency Screening hub as described below.

Education Support

Supporting Vulnerable Children (Connect Service)

- 3.12 For some the absence of a regular school day and other community supports can escalate their vulnerability. With only a small number of children and young people physically attending a school due to Covid, it was important to establish a service to ensure continuing support for those who might need it throughout this period.
- 3.13 The Connect Service was established to provide a virtual 'Named Person' service, offering support to schools where there is a risk of increasing vulnerability, so that our collective resources can be used to provide meaningful interventions, promote individual and family wellbeing, and reduce the risk of escalation.
- 3.14 The Connect Offer promotes input at four different levels:
Universal – as described above in the Connect at schools section. For pre-school children the universal offer is delivered by Health Visitors.
- Universal with Support** - offered by the Health Visiting Service or school in partnership with school inclusion workers and/or central supports e.g. Home School Link Workers, Educational Psychology, Youth Workers. Minimum of 1 weekly contact by phone/email/online.
- Targeted Support** – flexible delivery based on relational approaches. Delivered in close partnership with the relevant school/Health Visitor by Connect Team with a twice weekly phone/text/online contact, fortnightly 'eyes on' support, provision of wellbeing support packs, online conversation and group offers.
- Intensive Targeted Support** - for the most vulnerable children and families, led by Social Work and in partnership with the Connect Team as required. Individual personalised packages put in place, with some children allocated places at the Childcare Hubs.
- 3.15 The Connect Service also offers a Multi-Agency Support Hub (MASH) to coordinate multi-agency discussions and to plan for a holistic and timely response to emerging needs. A child can be referred to the MASH at any of the four different levels described above with supports and resources available from all participating agencies, and with links into third sector and community supports. The MASH meets virtually twice a week. The support provided will be varied, focussing on virtual contacts but recognising the need for some 'in person' contact but taking account of social distancing guidance at all times.
- 3.16 The Connect Team is multi-disciplinary with input from the SEBN Service, Locality Teams, Youth Work, Health, Police, Social Work, Educational Psychology and Early Years.

Additional Support Needs (Severe and Complex)

- 3.17 The Additional Support Needs team has focussed on supporting schools to support children to continue their learning at home while schools are closed. Principal Teachers ASN are providing learning packs and online resources for stimulation and interaction at home. Principal Teachers ASN or key workers

are also in regular contact with families, with further support available from Social Work and the Third Sector.

- 3.18 Where professionals working with families consider that support is required outside of the home, to offer more direct contact and to provide respite for vulnerable families, there is also the possibility of requesting a place at one of three 'severe and complex hubs' across Moray – at Ladybird Developmental Playgroup (Lossiemouth) for pre-school children and at Millbank and Keith Primary Schools for school age children.
- 3.19 Places are allocated through the MASH process described above, with attendance agreed following a detailed risk assessment. The number of sessions allocated is dependent on individual circumstances and follows the principle of minimising the amount of time outside of the home in line with Scottish Government guidance. Transport to the severe and complex is available if required, and lunch is also provided.
- 3.20 The Severe and Complex workstream is supported by a multi-agency team including Principal Teachers ASN and Health representatives.

Educational Psychology

- 3.21 The Educational Psychology service is offering a fully virtual service, continuing to support children and families known to them, and attending virtual case reviews and child's planning meetings. In response to the COVID-19 crisis the team has also been developing additional supports for schools, colleagues, families and children including:
- A categorised list of resources to support colleagues, children and families during the crisis
 - A listening ear service (phone call) for colleagues, parents and children (with the option to refer into Educational Psychology for ongoing support)
 - Looking at themes from the phone calls received, developing resources associated with the most common themes to support discussions with parents (e.g. Emotions Coaching, Transitions).

SEBN Service

- 3.22 The SEBN Service is continuing to support children referred to their service prior to the crisis with wellbeing packs and regular virtual (and in person if required) contact in line with the targeted supports described in the Connect Team section above. The Service is also fully involved in supporting the Connect Service.

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

- 3.23 The EAL service is continuing to support the wellbeing and language learning of EAL learners and their parents using virtual methods (phone, email, GLOW). The service is also developing resource packs to enable learners to continue to develop their English Language skills while the schools are closed.

Sensory Support Services

- 3.24 The Sensory Support Service is continuing to support the wellbeing and learning of children with sensory needs, linking in with parents using online methods and developing and distributing resources to support continued engagement.

Moray Autism Service

- 3.25 The Moray Autism Service is continuing to support the wellbeing of autistic children, young people and their families through virtual methods (phone, email, GLOW). The service is also signposting families to online support resources that help them maintain positive family routines and reduce anxieties. Team members are also supporting young people in the Hubs and delivering respite activities in the community.

Business Support - Free School Meals

- 3.26 The Business Support Team established and is continuing to manage the Free School Meal Voucher scheme for pre-school and school age children. Over 94% of families who are entitled to receive school meals have been contacted and have been provided with vouchers.
- 3.27 The Team is also completing placing requests, reviewing changes to the DSM scheme and continuing with essential school recruitment.

Instrumental Music Service

- 3.28 The Instrumental Music Service Instructors are developing opportunities such as tutorial videos, instructor feedback on pupils recording of their playing and are developing how to offer lessons via video call. General musical challenges have been shared on the service Facebook page. The Youth Music Initiative Instructors are providing music related activities to class teachers and Instructors are available to discuss learners' progress and provide advice regarding next steps.

Sport & Leisure

- 3.29 All sport and leisure facilities were closed on Friday 20 March and currently remain closed. Weekly sports challenges have been developed and shared on the service Facebook page. Sports and leisure staff have been carrying out essential pool maintenance duties, although some are now redeployed.

Libraries & Information Services

- 3.30 Libraries closed on Friday 20 March and currently remain closed. The service has increased investment in online resources (e-books, e-audiobooks and e-comics) for access from home and new borrowers can sign up for membership online. An online book club is available through the service Facebook page.

Essential Skills and Learning Centre Advisors, Records Management teams

- 3.31 Continuing to provide services remotely where possible

Duke of Edinburgh (DofE)

3.32 “DofE with a Difference” was launched nationally, which enables participants to change activities and capture assessments with the support of parents in the home. Staff continue to support young people who access their DofE accounts

Community Resilience

Grampian Community Assistance Hub (GCAH)

3.33 Public sector organisations across Moray and Grampian have been working in partnership to make sure our local communities, businesses and residents receive all the support they need during the Covid-19 crisis. A virtual contact centre was established to serve residents of Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray. A particular area of focus for this new service has been support for individuals and households impacted by the pandemic, including those who are shielding and those who have health vulnerabilities. The contact centre provides a crucial link between the needs of individuals and support within communities. The service directs people to where they can access help including:

- essential food and medication
- links to local social work services for vulnerable children or adults
- accessing emotional support
- contacting local volunteer groups

Moray Community Resilience Teams

3.34 A more local Moray Community Resilience Team (MCRT) has been set up to complement and support the work of the GCAH. The MCRT includes staff from the Council Community Support Unit, Moray Health and Social Care Partnership and tsiMORAY. The team works in localities to support established and establishing voluntary and community groups who are responding to the COVID-19 emergency, mapping local services and the need they are addressing in communities; ensuring resilience in the arrangements as the pandemic progresses; providing a link service for other Moray Council/MHSCP teams to the community support so that service users can be supported in a responsive and coordinated way; and looking at how community resilience can be developed and sustained as we move into the recovery phase.

3.35 The teams have also supported groups to access external funding through HIE, William Grant, The Adam Family Foundation and Moray Emergency Relief Fund to name a few.

3.36 The team is also working with tsiMORAY to develop a single source of information (hosted on the tsiMORAY website) on all the COVID related responses (public sector, third sector and community) as a resource for all professionals and communities across Moray.

Community Food Fund

- 3.37 The locality teams will be working with community organisations to develop applications to the Moray Council Food Fund, developing community food responses to emerging need, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups (including those who have become isolated due to isolation and social distancing measures) and marginalised people who may be less engaged with public services (e.g. homeless, gypsy travellers, refugees etc.).

Governance Strategy & Performance

Welfare Benefits and Money Advice

- 3.38 The benefits team have seen an increase in demand for support for people in financial difficulty during this time. A 'Money Worries during the Coronavirus Outbreak' leaflet has been prepared and summarises the support available. Welfare benefits claims have increased compared to the same period last year and there continue to be weekly increases in applications for Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis and Support grants.
- 3.39 In addition to administering the normal range of benefits, the team have assisted with identifying those were eligible for school meal vouchers and shielded individuals who qualify for fresh food deliveries on financial grounds.
- 3.40 People applying for benefits are also being assessed for eligibility for the Flexible Food Fund which has been developed locally and is administered by the Welfare benefits team.

Revenues/Non Domestic Rates Team

- 3.41 Debt enforcement has been de-prioritised and the team have concentrated on maximising direct debit income. A large piece of work has been administering the Scottish Government business support grants. As at 5 May 2010 the team had dealt with 1,354 applications and awarded 1,117 grants totalling over £12 million pounds.

Registrars

- 3.42 Services for registration of births and marriages have been suspended and arrangements have been put in place for remote registration of deaths.

Performance Reporting

- 3.43 A weekly Covid response dashboard has been developed for oversight of local statistics related to the pandemic. The RIO team has also provided support for a range of information and research tasks, for example to enable the establishment of free school meals and food fund services, reporting on benefits claims, information gathering on critical services for the emergency response and recovery planning.

Contact Centre and Access Points

- 3.44 Access Points have been closed to the public and Contact Centre calls have been screened to prioritise essential services. Messaging has asked the public to use online or telephone services where possible. This has meant an overall reduction in calls and increase in emails to the Contact Centre, which has worked well with staff working remotely.

Legal, Licensing and Committee

- 3.45 Legal services have been operating on a skeleton staffing arrangement to support essential services and a maintaining a baseline of activity in Licensing. Committee staff have been supporting the Emergency Cabinet and looking at future arrangements for virtual meetings.

HR, ICT and Communications

Human Resources

- 3.46 The HR service has focused on critical service delivery during the emergency including Payroll, Health and Safety and workforce planning and policy issues. The range of adjustments that have been required to the council's employment framework are summarised in Appendix 1. In addition the HR team has gathered information on the skills and experience of employees not required to maintain critical service delivery across the council and has identified suitable staff and organised their deployment to alternative work to support the emergency response.
- 3.47 An interchange page has been established for all of the guidance to staff and managers.

Communications

- 3.48 There has been an increased focus on communications which has required rapid turnaround and frequent communications to keep up with the changing situation. Weekly briefings have been established for staff, managers and elected members as well as the council coronavirus webpages, regular press releases and social media activity.

Technology

- 3.49 Following the government advice to encourage people to work from home and the council's move to deliver critical and emergency response services only, the ICT Service set out to provide equipment to critical service staff to enable them to work from home. However, providing equipment for homeworking to critical service users was viewed as phase 1 of an ongoing requirement to enable most, if not all, staff with the ability to work from home. In the first stages of the emergency, the assessment of the requirement for critical services gave rise to 290 new requests to enable homeworking. These request were met and services allocated the hardware to priority staff.
- 3.50 This resulted in the potential for over 600 devices attempting to access the council network. This required an extension to the access to the virtual private network (vpn) which is used to provide a secure connection to the council network from home. Pending the delivery of the equipment required,

restrictions were put in place to manage the volume of traffic on the vpn, including alternative ways of working and ICT staff volunteering to provide extended hours of support. Access to the VPN has now been expanded to enable greater homeworking and further hardware will be rolled out taking account of the priority allocated to services as part of the emergency response or preparing for recovery.

- 3.51 Video conferencing (VC) has become a key tool during the pandemic. While a VC solution has been available for use by council staff for some time, demand has escalated rapidly. Arrangements are being made to expand the options for VC and these will be rolled out as soon as the supplier gives the go ahead. While using a fully secure system is essential for formal communications where personal or sensitive data may be exchanged, for general keep in touch communication between staff, a number of solutions can be used for example, WhatsApp, Facetime, Skype.
- 3.52 The ICT team have also been working with schools on the provision of technology to support remote learning and on external funding to increase the provision of technology in schools.
- 3.53 A number of e-Forms have been developed to assist services with their response including key worker childcare applications, pupil equipment loan requests and self-referral form for Covid-19 testing,

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

There are no direct implications arising from this report. All action taken is consistent with the corporate plan and Loip.

(b) Policy and Legal
None

(c) Financial implications

Financial implications have been considered as part of the development of the responses to the Covid pandemic and are reported by the Chief Financial Officer in regular monitoring reports. In particular there has been a requirement to fund additional ICT equipment to expand homeworking, the extension of the EAP provision, for food support which has been funded through the government Food Fund and for the Scottish Government business support grants.

(d) Risk Implications

None from report. A number of the measures described in the report have been put in place to address risk. There ongoing risks as the Council continues its emergency response, moves into recovery and begins to re-instate services. These will be considered and addressed as planning for the whole programme of work and individual service issues progresses.

(e) Staffing Implications

Deployed Staff

Employees from the following services have been deployed to alternative work to support the emergency response. All employees have been deployed on a voluntary basis and their flexibility has been greatly appreciated:

- Libraries - redeployed to support (virtually) the Grampian Covid-19 Assistance Hub;
- Active School Coordinators volunteered to work in the Childcare Hubs
- Sports and Leisure redeployed to the Community Pharmacy Scheme; collecting medicines from local pharmacies and delivering them to vulnerable and shielded individuals across Moray;
- Audit – support for the welfare benefits team

Many council employees are now working from home and this is continuing to expand. Including teaching staff, over 1500 employees are now actively working at home with many others making use of personal devices for more limited homeworking pending the extension of council provision beyond critical services. While homeworking has been established in Moray since the Council was created in 1996 and was expanded during the Designing Better Service programme, the scale and extent (100% of time for many) during Covid is new and has brought challenges for employees and managers.

Managers and supervisors, including head teachers have been maintaining contact with employees to ensure that they are engaging and supporting individuals and groups of staff. Remote supervision and contact with colleagues can be isolating and new approaches are being developed to deal with this such as planned informal team chats. There is no doubt that this experience will influence the design of work and provide flexibility and resilience for the future.

The employee assistance provision Time for Talking has been extended to ensure that there is independent advice and support available for employees to access.

(f) Property

None directly arising from this report. However, a number of council properties are being used differently from normal to support the council and community response to the emergency.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

None directly arising from this report, although a number of the measures put in place in response to the covid pandemic have been to respond to socio economic and equalities issues.

(h) Consultations

The Heads of Service in Education, Communities and Organisational Development have all contributed to this report.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1** The covid pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented change to the delivery of council services. For critical services, immediate changes were required to enable as much as possible to be delivered remotely, which has resulted in new ways of working and modified services. There will be many lessons to be learned from this and as the council moves towards recovery, planning and review has commenced to ensure that these lessons are taken forward into future service delivery models.
- 5.2** It has also been necessary to design and deliver new services and solutions at pace, including childcare for keyworkers, a covid support hub, community resilience teams, financial support to ensure access to food for those facing hardship and many revised employment arrangements. There has also been a transformational shift to remote services and homeworking which will be influential in future service and job design.
- 5.3** It is likely to be some time before a new normal prevails. A number of the services established in the emergency response will have to continue for some time. Meanwhile, services such as schools are evolving to deliver services in new ways as society adjusts to living with covid, and other services will be re-activating to resume their normal roles. This will prove challenging to deliver in tandem and planning is underway to ensure a measured programme of work with a clear vision that builds in flexibility and resilience as this covid pandemic continues to unfold.

Author of Report: Denise Whitworth
Background Papers: None