

SUMMARY OF LOCKDOWN ACTIVITIES – LEARNING DEPARTMENT

GENERAL

- All teams set up Keeping in Touch (KIT) processes for children and families – this was coordinated so that families were not receiving too many calls from different officers – see also Appendix A
- All managers remain in regular contact with their staff through daily contact and weekly team meetings. Managers continue to oversee priorities and performance across the teams
- Weekly staff tracking form completed to show staff now available for work
- Variety of applications and reports completed for Welsh Government (WG) where requested including lessons learnt reports for Vulnerable Learners, Funding Flexibility, C-CAS, Adult Community Learning, Whole Schools Approach to Emotional Wellbeing, ALN additional monies, Counselling
- Distributed accelerated learning money and cleaning allocation from WG to schools prior to September reopening
- Regular contact maintained with WG to consult and update on changes to policy and guidance
- Financial claims prepared with accountancy
- All staff across the departments have completed the Covid Workforce Risk Assessment
- Daily Education Senior Leadership Team meetings during lockdown
- At least weekly meetings with Headteachers during lockdown
- Weekly school linked trade union meetings during lockdown
- Three-weekly meetings with all departmental team leaders during lockdown
- Team leaders having team meetings on weekly basis during lockdown
- Continued annual Performance management process with all staff
- The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) team (0-16) have continued to perform its statutory functions. Officers have been available throughout the period, to provide advice and guidance to families and schools and liaise with partner agencies. Statements of Special Educational Need have been completed appropriately and regular admissions panels for specialist provisions have continued via Microsoft Teams including those for Flying Start, the Childcare Offer and Families First
- Welsh Education Forum met twice via Teams
- Challenge and Support Panels for relevant schools met
- Summer literacy reading festival for all children who are in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) and their younger siblings (supported by Merthyr Valleys Homes, Wales and West Housing and Stephens and George Charitable Trust)

SCHOOLS

- On 20th March, school closed for learning and the Education Minister announced the repurposing of schools as emergency childcare provision for critical workers and facilities for vulnerable learners.
- By the 23rd March the Learning Department set up six hubs across the authority (see Appendix B)
 - A number of children were also supported to access community-based childcare settings within the community
 - These arrangements included setting up an online admissions process and panel
 - The six school hub arrangements stopped on June 22nd allowing schools to reopen for Catch Up and Check In arrangements on June 29th.
 - From 22nd June – all schools provided their own childcare facility until the end of term (admissions still managed centrally)
 - Those children supported in childcare settings continued to access this provision

- Attendance during the Catch-up and Check-in period was 53.3% for primary schools and 24.5% for secondary schools.
- All schools delivered home learning activities during the school lockdown period. Engagement in this varied from school to school and many schools adapted their approach to the delivery of this during this time.
 - Advice and guidance available from the Central South Consortium to support this work and continues.
- Prior to re-opening in June, all schools undertook risk assessments supported by the LA Health and Safety Team. These risk assessments were shared with staff, unions and governors and have subsequently been re-adjusted for opening in September
 - Support was provided for schools to ensure that they have been able to reopen buildings safely, and advice on managing spaces and movement around buildings has been given when requested.
- All secondary schools, LRBs, PRU and Greenfield produced transition videos to share with their new September intake
- School report format – a working party of Primary Headteachers worked with a Challenge Adviser to develop a school report template that was used across all schools; a similar approach was undertaken with the secondary schools and their Challenge Advisers – these templates were also shared across Wales
- Wellbeing curriculum for Catch-up & Check-in; a pack of resources was developed for all primary schools again with a Challenge Adviser and a group of Headteachers
- Ongoing guidance on blended learning from Central South Consortium for schools

CATERING & CLEANING

- During lockdown standard clean for hubs, enhanced clean for suspected cases
 - Extra clean at midday – sourced through SOLO
 - All schools thorough clean prior to re-opening on 22nd June had also had thorough clean during summer holiday period
 - Extra clean at midday from 29th June and this will also continue for the foreseeable future
- For two weeks from 23rd March, the local authority provided FSM bags, by the end of the two weeks delivering approx. 7,779 meals across the County Borough. For the next four weeks the local authority provided supermarket vouchers to parents, equivalent of £3.90 per day per child.
 - Since 4th May we moved to a system of either direct payments or vouchers depending on choice (approximately 12% choosing vouchers)
 - Payments stopped as of 11th September – Welsh Government have funded additional costs over and above the budgeted costs to provide FSM.
 - Since lockdown the number of children eligible for FSM has increased by 7.4% as of August

ADMISSIONS

- All reception allocations were made in April and the service was still able to inform all parents of offers via email and letter
- All secondary allocations were made prior to lockdown
- All nursery admissions were made for the Summer term before lockdown, but due to the pandemic were automatically rolled on to the September 2020 allocation
- All schools were informed of their successfully allocated pupils before the end of the academic year, via electronic reports
- All mid-term admissions have been processed as and when they have arrived
- Parent meetings have continued to take place, where necessary, via Teams
- Continued contact with schools to ensure that all pupils have allocated school places

INCLUSION/ALN

- The Inclusion Service and additional learning teams continued to support schools, parents / carers and pupils during lockdown through a combination of remote consultations and direct work with the most vulnerable children and young people (see Appendix A for summary). It should also be noted that colleagues in Inclusion made several home visits, where other agencies were able to only work remotely to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable of pupils.
- Additional Support Allocations were completed in lockdown and schools informed of their allocation for the academic year 2020/21
- Educational Psychologists produced a training pack for schools in readiness for re-opening in June – this included support for anxiety, wellbeing and transition and Facebook videos produced to support parents and young people
- The Early Years and Flying Start Education Psychologist is in contact with the childcare settings to offer support for ALN children to provide any strategies for support (part of Families First)
- Speech and Language Training delivered online to 19 schools
- During lockdown a Vulnerable Learners Panel was set up including staff from the Learning department (Early Years, Inclusion, Youth Services, Families First), Social Services, YOS, Police and Health to discuss provision, address issues and ensure families and their children are kept safe – this work was supported by a detailed database which identified which staff were keeping in touch with which family – it was supported by schools who were able to identify where they had concerns for example due to lack of engagement.
- Since lockdown there has been additional support from the School Based Counselling Service funded by Welsh Government – this has reduced demand considerably and enabled The Exchange to reduce their waiting time
- All Inclusion teams have continued to support transition from early years through to post-16 with many schools choosing to develop welcome videos for their new pupils
- Transition information and Team Around the Child processes have continued virtually for ALN children who are transitioning to school in September.
- School Nursing support has engaged with eight primary schools, three out of the four secondary schools and the PRU
- A Support Guide for parents of ALN children in Early years was developed with tips and ideas for how to support children during Covid 19.

Summer Holiday Childcare Programme

- Mapping work was undertaken with Social Services and Learning to identify the most vulnerable children across the authority
- 11 families with 24 school age children accepted a place initially to attend community-based childcare during the summer holidays funded through the WG Summer Holiday programme.
- Throughout the summer a further 18 children, involved with Social Services, have been supported to access community-based childcare
- Social Services have been kept updated on non-attendance.

English as and Additional Language (EAL)/Gypsy Travellers (GT)

- Produced home learning packs of resources for EAL/GT pupils related to language acquisition and wellbeing; identified digitally excluded EAL/GT learners; sourced and purchased curriculum and wellbeing books for EAL/GT pupils; created and delivered paper-based resources and learning packs;
 - delivered sanitary products to Yr6 and secondary pupils.
- Worked closely with schools to ensure that EAL/GT pupils were engaging with learning
 - where they were not, carried out follow-up visits to offer support
- Supported EAL/GT children and young people to complete the Children's Commissioners Coronavirus & Me survey
- Drafted EAL/GT Newsletter to be circulated to schools

GOVERNING BODIES

- At the start of the academic year 2019/20 all governors were given access to Hwb
- Since lockdown there has been a change in how we meet with Governing Bodies, which has been a huge success and all schools have managed to meet virtually via Microsoft Teams – business as usual online
- Work has been more diverse working differently across teams to support schools
- Specific activities include
 - Weekly wellbeing check with Headteacher and chair of Governors
 - Daily collection of School HUB and check in data
 - Support for Governors accessing Hwb and Microsoft Teams
 - Closing of financial account 2019/20, setting budget 2020/21 feeding into Mid Term Financial Plan (MTFP)
 - Support for staff interviews
- Three meetings have been held with Chairs of Governors during this time and they have been copied into the main emails to Headteachers so that they and other Governors are informed of the changing landscape

MUSIC SERVICE

- All school pupils receiving instrumental/vocal lessons invited to an online, weekly, musically-themed quiz in place of the usual rehearsals; during the quiz all members practiced (muted!) a newly commissioned piece in preparation for when weekly rehearsals are permitted to restart
- Supported in one of the hubs on a weekly basis
- Remote lessons in three primary schools and three secondary schools
- Wellbeing workshops at end of term in two schools

EARLY YEARS

The Early Language Development (ELD) Offer (part of Families First)

- The ELD team and Flying Start Speech and Language Therapist continue to work with all open cases, using video links and phone calls to encourage families to continue to support their child's early language development
- Language resource packs have been distributed to families
- Engagement of new children into ELD opportunities through the health team and self-referrals
- Merthyr Tydfil chosen as one of four UK Local Authorities to work closely with the BBC on their Tiny Happy People 10-year language and communication campaign for early years
- Weekly 'closed' ELD sessions started to be delivered 'live' by a multimedia platform, plus 'bitesize' sessions promoted to the wider community via Facebook pages
- Daily ELD activity posts to the Flying Start Facebook page

Childcare Offer & C-CAS

- The Childcare Offer was suspended for new applications from 1st April 2020 and funding was repurposed to C-CAS
- 104 pre-school children and older siblings of keyworkers and vulnerable children were funded via C-CAS to attend childcare up until 31st August 2020
- Childcare Offer reinstated from 1st September 2020

Flying Start

- Flying Start eligible children were re-introduced back to childcare from 29th July 2020; this was on a reduced basis in line with guidance. Early indication suggests that circa 22% of Flying Start children attended some level of childcare in the three weeks before the end of term

- It is expected that the majority of Flying Start children will resume back to childcare in September on a phased basis
- The Flying Start childcare team has drafted blended opportunities in the Early Years Good Practice Guide which offers advice on engaging with and supporting children and their families when they are not attending childcare

Local Authority managed Flying Start Childcare settings

- There are three Local Authority managed Flying Start pre-school settings and recent activity has included;
 - Managing all CIW notifications of change including moving from sessional care to full day-care (childcare hub)
 - Communicating with CIW via telephone and email
 - Setting up Facebook pages for settings to communicate with their families, Facebook parent contract developed
 - Induction, transition videos developed for new starters
 - Transition meetings held for new families
 - Developing new policies and practices to comply with Covid guidance; Developing risk assessments for reopening of childcare, in line with WG advice: Protective measures in childcare settings: Keep Childcare Safe
 - Preparing the physical environment for reopening
 - Developing protocols for dealing with suspected and positive cases of Covid 19.

YOUTH SERVICE

Targeted Supported – referral through schools, Early Help Hub, Social Services

Inspire to Work (Post 16)

- Supporting young people with job search, job applications mock interviews and CV's over the phone or via video conferencing
- Young people have been enrolled onto e-learning courses e.g. Food Safety, with support provided by a tutor
- Resources have been updated for delivery of new Agored Cymru PSE units.

School Support Team

- BTEC Level One PSD certificates have been claimed (prior to school closures). Awaiting update from Pearson Edexcel on BTEC Level Two qualifications. Preparation is underway for delivery in the new academic year.

Universal, Open Access Service, Local Authority & Commissioned Providers

Street Based Team

- Currently deploying for four shifts per week using intelligence from South Wales Police

Open Access Youth Clubs (including commissioned providers (Treharris Boys & Girls Club, Georgetown Boys & Girls Club, Urdd/Menter Iaith, Dowlais Engine House, Gellideg Foundation, Twynrodyn Action Group, Merthyr Valley Homes (Gurnos), Willow's Centre, (Troedyrhiw))

- Virtual Youth Club is being delivered at various times throughout the week to deliver a variety of activities, including quizzes, podcasts, competitions, open mic, keep fit, etc
- Weekly phone contact with vulnerable young people is taking place, discussing any concerns or issues that they may be experiencing
- Youth workers are available via Messenger on a rota basis to deal with queries and concerns
- Information and advice is updated and posted on youth clubs own social media sites
- Staff and young people have been involved in the delivery of activity packs, hygiene packs and food parcels to families and individuals in their communities

Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum (MTBWYF)

- Regular meetings, via video conferencing, are held with members of the Youth Forum to discuss current and future projects
- The Forum has contributed to recent discussions on the effectiveness of current on-line learning arrangements with schools and the new RARS Strategy
- The Forum has completed a recycling competition, been involved in the development of a reading festival and are producing a documentary on the local impact of Covid-19, with involvement of the First Minister

NEET's Team

- Monitoring and tracking of Year 11 'high risk' potential NEET and post 16 NEET young people is taking place through regular contact with schools, Inspire to Achieve and other youth service targeted teams, Careers Wales, Communities for Work, College Merthyr Tydfil and work-based learning

ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING

- Adult education tutors have maintained a Keeping in Touch (KIT) approach with learners using a variety of communication methods - phones, text, emailing and online tools such as Microsoft Teams. Wherever possible, course delivery has been maintained digitally, with course work shared via electronic means and for learners without access the use of postal services, via workbooks and tasks
- Initially learner numbers were low as everyone dealt with the impact of the pandemic. Learner numbers have increased, with the hope that as schools and community venues open, many more learners will reengage
- A number of training sessions for staff in the use of digital media have been set. Tutors exploring and using their newly acquired skills to work towards enhancing their delivery and online blended learning approaches. However, the development of digital and remote learning continues to be a challenge for both staff and learners, and will be a key focus and priority for the department going forward with the use of the WG Digital 2030 additional capital grant to address IT poverty
- For the Family programmes, three out of the five schools have already confirmed they would like to offer the course for the new academic year and the rolling programme of skills clubs and ECDL/online basics continues to be offered. Until schools and community venues have confirmed the details of opening up their venues, courses will be continued to be offered digitally.

OTHER FAMILIES FIRST ACTIVITIES

Integrated Counselling

- Extra capacity secured through WG grant
- Normal hours throughout lockdown
- Online content developed through You-Tube videos focussing on emotional wellbeing themes
- Bespoke programmes for families delivered via video calls

Parenting

- Supporting Parent peer support groups using Facebook/Messenger
- Delivery hours remain same
- Virtual groups – parents participating with other parents
- Use of social media platforms increased to support parents

Team Around the Family

- Continued to work as usual
- In addition, took on extra 23 cases who could not be allocated to specific projects due to lockdown
- TAF panel met virtually on fortnightly basis

Key Working, Family Support, Young Carers (Barnardo's)

- Delivery hours remain the same

- Coordinating with other services
- Access to foodbanks and providing vouchers for milk, etc, delivering welfare packs
- Providing advocacy

CAPITAL PROJECTS

Planning and development for future projects continued through lockdown and communication with all partners has been maintained.

Schools

- Major Capital projects ongoing during the pandemic
 - YYG New Build (Band A)
 - Trelewis additional classroom and internal reconfiguration works
 - Ysgol Santes Tudful additional classroom
 - Community Hub extension
 - Ty Dysgu Dowlais Bungalow and main building refurb / reconfiguration
 - Electrical rewiring and new gas heating system projects in Cyfarthfa Park and Gwaunfarren Primary Schools
 - Cyfarthfa High school site security works
 - Internal reconfiguration providing additional classroom space in Pant and Caedraw Primary schools.
 - Edwardsville Primary accessibility adaptations
- Capital maintenance programmes have also been carefully assessed and prioritised with many works undertaken during the summer including major roof repairs, toilet upgrades, replacement boilers and heating controls etc.

Early Years

- Continue to Progress 2020/21 Childcare Offer capital programme with Property Services including architect plans, capital agreements, lease agreements and liaising with providers and schools
- Prioritising Flying Start Capital projects that can be completed in 2020/21
- Small grants scheme (Early Years) - obtaining an update from providers that have been awarded funding. Held a virtual panel meeting to discuss the applications made for funding.

CAPITA ONE

- Prior to COVID MTCBC became the first local authority in Wales and the second across both England and Wales to move to Capita Cloud hosting services. Go live date was 20th January 2020.
- This has provided the benefit of all staff across the Learning Department that access Capita One being able to continue to access Capita One remotely throughout the duration of the pandemic, without the need for technical installation and support to set up
- Any technical issues experienced over this period have been dealt with by a dedicated and responsive support team so that issues have been resolved quickly.
- A reliable technical solution is allowing us to move forward with plans to develop our use of the software as significantly less time is taken up dealing with technical issues and delays.
- Since COVID good progress has been made in the emerging priority re the SEND module for modernising the transfer and sharing of information relating to SEN statements, panels, professional advices etc. as well as the recording of Children Looked After information on Capita One
- There is still an urgent need to increase the capacity of staffing to support the use of Capita One moving forward