



## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT**

Date Written	23 <sup>rd</sup> February 2021
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Service Area	Learning
Committee Date	15 <sup>th</sup> March 2021

*To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen*

### **Update on Activity – Pandemic**

#### **1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This report shows the ongoing challenges faced by the Learning Department as a result of the pandemic.
- 1.2 It provides members with an overview of the work undertaken by the department during this time.
- 1.3 It considers what needs to be done next to ensure children and young people have the best educational experiences possible in order to mitigate the impact of lockdown.

#### **2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 The content of this report is discussed and noted.

#### **3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 This report aims to show ongoing impact of the pandemic on the Learning Department and how it maintained and delivered key services to children, young people and their families since September 2020 when the first report was presented to members. (see Appendix 1)
- 3.2 In order to support Committee Members to understand the ongoing challenges and the ways in which responses to these have been designed and delivered, the department is providing an overview of how the pandemic has continued to affect their ability to meet the needs of children, young people and their families.
- 3.3 Committee Members are asked to consider the report's content in line with the feedback they have received from the communities they represent.

## **4.0 WHERE WE WERE**

- 4.1 On 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 all schools closed for learning. At the same time a high number of childcare settings closed, although a few stayed open to provide childcare for keyworkers.
- 4.2 Learning Department staff were asked to work from home and arrangements were made to provide staff with appropriate equipment. Staff supporting the delivery of Free School Meals (FSM) remained in the office for another two weeks.
- 4.3 Since lockdown, the department has continued to deliver services and support schools, Early Years settings and Adult Learning remotely – a summary of these activities was presented to Scrutiny members on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020.
- 4.4 Since September there have been ongoing challenges faced, both by schools and the Learning Department.
  - 4.4.1 Some part-time sessional staff who deliver face-to-face work with children and young people have been unable to work due to government regulations.
- 4.5 All staff within the department have continued where possible to work from home, although when appropriate face-to-face contact with school staff has taken place, subject to social distancing and relevant risk assessments.
- 4.6 During the Autumn Term nearly all schools were affected by cases which necessitated the closing of classes, with a number of schools being particularly affected. (see Appendix 2 for Attendance summary)

## **5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW**

- 5.1 Staff within the department continue to work from home wherever possible. From April 1<sup>st</sup> three main offices within Unit 5 will no longer be used by Learning Department staff and these staff will be given hot desks in the Civic Centre.
- 5.2 The multi-agency Education Partnership Panel (EPP) has met three times since September 2020.
  - 5.2.1 This Panel has discussed the progress towards the Raising Aspirations, Raising Standards (RARS) Strategy and have received reports from officers on current standards (see Appendix 3a and 3b).
- 5.3 A Vulnerable Learners Panel set up during lockdown continues to meet.
- 5.4 There has been an 18.5% increase in the actual number of children eligible for FSM over the lockdown period. In comparison to the total pupil population the percentage of pupils eFSM has risen from 22.5% to 28.3% over this period (2,549 / 8,997).
- 5.5 Schools did not re-open for face-to-face learning in January 2021 but moved to remote learning for all learners with the exception of Ty Dysgu, which remained open for all learners.

## 5.6 Phased return to school

- Since February 23<sup>rd</sup> Foundation Phase Pupils have begun a phased return to school.
- Children in all KS2 Learning Resource Classes have returned to school.
- All Children at Greenfield Special School have begun a phased return to school.

5.7 Childcare settings remain open for all children.

## 6.0 **WHERE WE WANT TO BE**

6.1 All childcare and school settings fully open.

- Breakfast clubs available for all parents subject to guidance on social distancing – the aim is to re-open these after Easter
- Attendance across schools to be at least where it was prior to March 2020
- Children, young people and staff able to access more comprehensive wellbeing support if needed
- All children and young people accessing high quality educational experiences.

6.2 All staff within the department able to work safely and carry out their substantive duties either in the workplace or where roles allow, from home.

6.3 All education settings working in partnership towards the ambitions of the Raising Aspirations Raising Standards (**RARS**) Strategy.

## 7.0 **WHAT WE NEED TO DO MOVING FORWARD**

7.1 The following will need to be undertaken to enable recovery to be swift and as robust as possible:

- Engage with Children's Services on a regular basis to ensure support is provided as soon as possible to those in need and explore devolving this to a cluster approach.
- Continue to engage with Headteachers and Governing Bodies as and when further guidance is issued from Welsh Government.

7.2 Ensure that the move for staff from Unit 5 to the Civic Centre is smooth and does not affect working arrangements.

7.3 Ensure the commitments within the RARS strategy are integral to all work across the department.

## 8.0 **CONTRIBUTION TO RARS**

8.1 The content of this report relates to the two overarching themes within RARS of

- Partnership and Collaboration; and
- Post Pandemic Recovery.

## **9.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES**

9.1 The content of this report relates to the following Wellbeing Objectives:

Best start to life: Children and young people are equipped with the skills they need to be successful learners and confident individuals.

Living Well: Tackling adverse childhood experiences and developing community resilience; improving emotional wellbeing and mental health.

**SUE WALKER**  
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**COUNCILLOR LISA MYTTON**  
**LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**  
**CABINET MEMBER FOR LEARNING**

<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>		
<b>Title of Document(s)</b>	<b>Document(s) Date</b>	<b>Document Location</b>
<b>Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?</b>		