

Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee Covid-19 Recovery

23 June 2020

Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. Receives and comments on the County County's approach to Covid-19 Recovery, as set out in the attached Cabinet report.
2. Comments on the specific issues relevant to the remit of this Committee that should be considered in the development of the Recovery Plan which is due to be submitted to Cabinet in September.

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This paper aims to provide an overview of the Council's approach to recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, as set out in the attached paper, approved by Cabinet on the 11 June.
- 1.2 Key to this work will be the development of a Recovery Plan that will be submitted to Cabinet for approval in September. This report seeks this Committee's comments on the approach to the development of the Recovery Plan as relevant to the remit of the Committee.
- 1.3 Following approval of the Recovery Plan, Overview and Scrutiny Committees will continue to have a role to play in recovery, particularly over the longer term as we move into the delivery phase. We will be building consideration of how we best achieve this into our review of scrutiny which we had planned pre-Covid and which we are preparing to restart in the coming weeks.

2.0 Supporting Information

- 2.1 For the past three months the Council has focused on responding to the Covid-19 crisis, working closely with key partners, locally, regionally and nationally.

2.2 Attention is now focused on developing a longer-term plan to support recovery from the crisis. Our Recovery approach includes the following key elements, with further details in the Cabinet report:

- Principles and objectives to guide recovery
- Efforts at local, county, sub/regional and national levels
- Phasing of efforts over
 - Foundation: 0-3 months,
 - Consolidation: 3-9 months
 - Acceleration: over 10 months
- Four themes of the recovery approach, focused on:
 - Place, Economy & Climate
 - Community and Voluntary Sector
 - Health, wellbeing and social care
 - Organisation, including the reinstating of services

- Engaging Members, staff, partners, business and the public on our recovery planning.

2.3 We are now in the Foundation stage and focusing on:

- standing up and reinstating WCC services in line with the national guidance about Covid-secure workplaces.
- seizing immediate opportunities to support communities/business.
- establishing recovery governance and approach; and
- engaging with the regional approach to setting recovery priorities including participating in the regional citizens' panel.

2.4 The key output from this phase will be a Recovery Plan that is presented to Cabinet for approval in September.

3.0 Focus of Response and Plans for Recovery

3.1 During the pandemic, the Council has worked flexibly and adapted in many ways to ensure that the residents, communities and businesses continued to receive key services and were supported to cope with the effects of Covid-19.

3.2 Examples of the responsiveness and actions taken by services within the remit of this Committee, include:

Education Services

- WCC's support for schools has been recognised regionally as being comprehensive and high quality. Many of our resources are being picked up and used by other local authorities. Similarly, we are benefitting from the resources shared with us by colleagues in other West Midlands authorities.

- Schools have been working extremely hard to keep pupils engaged with learning remotely, where they are unable to attend in person. There are some extremely successful models of remote learning which schools are sharing and developing. Our published transition guide exemplifies one way in which schools are harnessing the potential of technology to support pupils. The mixed economy of face-to-face and remote learning is called 'blended' or 'hybrid' learning. A great deal of local and national support for pupils' mental health and wellbeing is also being provided online.

- WCC colleagues from across education, public health and children's social care have been working extensively with colleagues in education settings to produce a wide range of support and resources including:
 - Daily bulletins and twice weekly meetings for school leaders to assist in summarising and applying national guidance
 - Helplines for education setting leaders and for parents and carers
 - Risk Assessment Guidance and Quality Assurance for Schools operating in response to Covid-19
 - Early years hub model developed against PVI setting closures to ensure childcare for key workers
 - Transition and induction guidance and case studies
 - Publication of reviews of online resources for home or eLearning
 - Webinars to support wellbeing run by Educational Psychology team (with up to 1600 participating in events)
 - Webinars to support teachers using online learning tools
 - Resources to support headteachers' wellbeing
 - WCC are also sending out social media messages about preparing to return-to-school. We are asking schools to retweet or post these via their own social media accounts.
 - Working with partners to develop and publish guidance and advice for parents and carers
 - Sign-posting families to support available for school children who are shielding
 - Supporting schools to ensure continued provision of education settings for key workers and vulnerable children during the lockdown period
 - Launched PPE and signage procurement strategies.
 - Implementing voucher schemes and other support for families with children who are eligible for free school meals.

- Following the Secretary of State's announcement on 10 June, it is no longer the government's ambition for all primary school children to experience at least one month of face to face education before the end of the summer term. However, there is continuing encouragement for more children to return to some onsite provision before the end of term. Pupils in Years 10 and 12 will be returning to secondary schools from 15 June in small groups. This will be in addition to their remote education. Early years and childcare settings have also been supported in their recovery planning.

- Comparative information shows that Warwickshire schools have consistently remained open throughout the pandemic. In terms of data on opening to year groups in addition to vulnerable and key worker children the numbers voluntarily attending are rising.

- There are growing concerns that many pupils could return to school in September potentially having had no experience in a school environment for five months. This will inevitably impact on their academic achievement, as well as their mental health and wellbeing.

- We are therefore working on the following further support:
 - Refining our eLearning offer to help schools plan longer term for a mixed economy or hybrid approach of face-to-face and remote learning.
 - Working across teams to identify other opportunities to support schools, for example with finding alternative accommodation if it is needed.
 - Developing a 'Warwickshire Offer' for disadvantaged pupils.



Children & Families Service- summary from John Coleman:

- Maintained essential services which have applied social distancing but predominantly continued with face to face meetings to ensure children at risk of harm are protected and supported.
- Adaptation of social work practices but within usual statutory timescales and regulations. The Children & Adoption Covid-19 Act regulations have not been applied other than for some children in care where there is low risk, we have used digital visits as a statutory visit.
- Child protection conferences and other key meetings have continued but predominantly using digital technology. As a result, Child Protection Strategy Meetings have seen an improvement in attendance from some agencies.
- Continued to provide face to face family time for children in care at around 20% usual service and by the end July the service will be back to 100% with around 250 family time sessions a week between children in care and their families.
- Increased support and communication for Warwickshire Foster Carers. Including financial support, wrap around support for young people struggling and online foster carer forums.
- Adoption and Fostering panels have moved online and continued to progress permanency plans as far as possible.
- Continued to provide support to care leavers, including food hampers, online support groups and face to face visits.
- Revised and implemented new approach to Youth Services which, as part of our changing offer, has included online groups and helped increased community outreach. One Youth Worker was named on a “West Midlands Hero” list for the online work to continue the Bike Project.

- Managed an initial increase in referrals during the inspection and then prepared the service's readiness for increased demand.
- Provided online support for professionals, particularly nurseries, schools and colleges.
- Increased sharing information and collaboration across Education & Learning and Children & Families to ensure the most vulnerable children's needs are met. This includes attendance at school.
- Facilitated and distributed laptop devices and Wi-Fi devices to children as part of WCC's scheme which has given over 150 reconditioned laptops to children in care and care leavers and the DfE programme of devices to children with a social worker and year 10 pupils.
- Work with commissioned services to ensure children remain visible to services and they continue to be proactive-e.g. on hidden harm series, with Compass and Change Grow Live (CGL) about substance misuse, RISE re mental health and anxiety support.
- Providing online and telephone support through the family information service and early help parenting support line.
- Led several communication campaigns utilising social media and Spotify with young people about social distancing and staying safe, such as [pledge to stay at home](#) and child safety week.
- Weekly Family Information Service newsletters which circulate to over 10,000 people about advice, information, tips and available support for children, young people and their families.

3.3 Further detail about the response to the Covid pandemic in relation to children in care, care leavers and foster carers has been provided to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

3.4 As we emerge from the immediate response phase and our plans for recovery are implemented, there will be a role for the Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider aspects of recovery as are relevant to the remit of the Committee, such as the work on health and social care recovery as well as aspects of community recovery. It is intended that there will be further opportunities for engagement with Committee Members as we move into the delivery phase from October and further reports will be brought to the Committee for its consideration.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 Work on the change portfolio/Recovery planning will be funded through the Organisational Change fund; the investment funds created in the MTFS are available to support one-off investments which will support recovery effort. The refresh of the rolling five-year MTFS from 2021-22 onwards will be the key mechanism for incorporating longer-term financial impacts of Covid-19.

5.0 Environmental Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct environmental implications of the proposed recovery approach. Climate change is one of four recovery themes proposed - 'Place, Economy and Climate'.

Appendices

Appendix 1 -Cabinet Report, 11 June 2020, Covid-19 recovery and reform

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