

Report

Cabinet



Part 1

Date: 22 July 2020

Subject Newport City Council's School Recovery Programme (Covid 19)

Purpose To endorse the School Recovery Programme that will enable schools to recover and operate whilst continuing to support the Council's Strategic aims set in the Corporate Plan 2017-22.

Author Chief Education Officer

Ward All

Summary The Covid 19 health emergency has posed significant and unprecedented challenge to the way we deliver our services and our way of life. Since March 2020, the Council's focus has been to preserve life, minimise the spread of the virus and support our communities and the vulnerable. Schools partially reopened on 29th June 2020 in order to prepare pupils to for the new academic year.

Proposal For Cabinet to approve and endorse the School Recovery Programme

Action by Cabinet

Timetable This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Leader of the Council
- Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
- Corporate Management Team
- Head Teacher representatives
- Education Senior Management Team

Signed

Background

The Covid 19 health emergency has posed a significant and unprecedented challenge to the way in which we deliver our services and our way of life. Since March 2020, the Council's focus has been to preserve life, minimise the spread of the virus, and support our communities and the vulnerable.

Newport City Council Strategic Recovery Aims have been drafted in reflection of the work undertaken by the Council in response to the crisis while also considering the Council's long-term aim to '*build a better Newport*' and supporting the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. The Council's Corporate Plan 2017-22 has four Wellbeing Objectives. Objective one relates to the recovery of schools.

Strategic Recovery Aim 1: Understand, and respond to, the additional challenges, which Covid19 has presented, including loss of employment, impact on business and on the progress, achievement and wellbeing of both mainstream and vulnerable learners.	
Wellbeing Objective 1 – To improve skills, education and employment opportunities	
To achieve this aim we will:	
1	Support schools and other education establishments to safely reopen for both school staff and pupils.
2	Work to prevent and reduce inequality of progress and outcomes in education for mainstream and vulnerable learners through the implementation of the National Continuity of Learning Plan.
3	Support schools to enhance and develop digital skills, digital teaching and learning platforms and enhanced support for digitally excluded learners.
4	Support and enable people that are digitally excluded to access community IT programmes, Council services and other public services.
5	Support people who have been affected by unemployment to access new opportunities through training and re-employment required for post Covid 19 businesses.
6	Ensure our diverse communities are appropriately supported through tailored interventions specific to their needs, including consideration of language, culture and points of access.

On Wednesday 3rd June 2020, the Welsh Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams MS, outlined the national approach for the return of children and young people to schools in Wales. The approach involves schools in Wales reopening on June 29th 2020. Welsh Government advocates a phased return to schools, supporting pupils to check in and catch-up with a focus on wellbeing, whilst also continuing with distance and online learning in and around school-based sessions. The reopening requires a clear focus on safety in accordance with social distancing legislation and associated Public Health Wales guidance. The aim is for schools to be open to pupils from all year groups for limited periods during the week, with only a third of pupils in school at any one time.

Attendance is voluntary based upon parental preference in line with current legislation and guidance. Children and young people who fall into the shielding category will carry on with online learning. School hub childcare is expected to continue, whilst taking account of demand and deliverability. Welsh Government Guidance was issued exactly one week after the announcement on Wednesday 10th June 2020.

Newport Local Authority Approach

In order to prepare for the reopening of schools in Newport, Education Services has established an Executive School Planning Group. The aim of this group is to develop a common framework and set of principles which are reflective of national guidance and local context in order to reopen schools safely

without unnecessary duplication of work for school leaders. The group is chaired by the Chief Education Officer and includes:

- The Chair of CONSHE (Conference of Newport Secondary Heads)
- The Chair of NAPHS (Newport Association of Primary Heads)
- Two additional secondary head teachers
- Two additional primary head teachers
- Deputy Chief Education Officer
- Head of Engagement and Learning
- Head of ALN and Inclusion
- Service Manager for Resources and Planning
- Health & Safety Manager for NCC
- Senior HR Business Partner for Education.

A series of sub groups operate outside of this group to progress specific actions. These include sub groups for:

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Support for Special Schools and Learning Resource Bases
- Transport
- Premises Management
- Human Resources / Workforce.
- Digital and IT

Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles have been established regarding the school recovery plan:

1. All planning will be focussed around keeping learners and staff safe.
2. Schools will design re-opening plans based around their capacity for cleaning, staffing and space. Re-opening plans should support 'up to one third of pupils', although it is recognised that this may not be possible in every school.
3. Where possible, the local authority promotes consistency of approach in the 'offer' to pupils returning to school. It is expected that pupils of statutory school age will engage in a weekly catch up experience over the summer term or three separate check in's.
4. Schools should not operate a separate morning and afternoon slot for pupils unless it has the capacity to clean to a satisfactory standard during a pupil changeover.
5. Schools may choose their own approach to non-statutory schooling. However there is an expectation that all pupils from Nursery and Sixth Form will have the opportunity to check in with a member of staff and see their school layout.
6. Schools need to make in school provision available for vulnerable children. Vulnerable children may require more frequent time in a school. This should be determined through a vulnerable pupil risk assessment.
7. All pupils currently in one of the thirty-six Newport Childcare Hubs will return to their 'home school' by June 29th. As advised by Welsh Government, children should remain in separate bubble classes.
8. Childcare applications will continue to be approved by each school. It is recognised that a surge in applications during the planning phase could jeopardise a return to school offer which has been made to a pupil or family not accessing the childcare hub. This should be avoided and schools may choose to consider suspending childcare applications for short periods of time if a

return to school offer previously made is at risk of being retracted. If a suspension of childcare applications is being considered it should be approved by the Chair of Governors and discussed in advance of the decision with the local authority.

9. Risk Assessments templates designed by the local authority in conjunction with Head teachers must be completed to reflect each individual schools circumstance. This must be signed off by the Chair of Governors.
10. Each school must have a record to state that a Chair of Governors (or whole Governing Body where possible) has approved their return to school planning.

Childcare Hubs

Childcare provision for children of critical workers and vulnerable learners has been offered across Newport schools since late March. A total of thirty-six childcare hubs have been in operation across all areas of the city and around three-hundred children have attended each day. Out of hours childcare on evenings and weekends, hosted by two schools and staffed by Regeneration, Investment and Housing staff, was in operation until 28th June.

When schools reopened all children attending childcare hubs moved back to their own school or setting. Children of key workers and vulnerable learners who were previously accessing childcare provision have continued to access this, alongside the learning that they are entitled to for the remainder of the summer term.

Based on Welsh Government advice stating that on returning to school, children should attend just one setting wherever possible, and should remain in the same small, consistent group within that setting, as far as possible. This will help reduce the likelihood of the virus moving between groups within that one setting, or moving between groups in different settings.

Vulnerable Groups & Learning Resource Bases (LRBs)

Around sixty vulnerable learners have attended the childcare hubs across the city at the invitation of their head teacher and in liaison with Education Services and Children's Services. Vulnerable children were identified for invitation to childcare provision using a bespoke risk assessment developed by the Local Authority.

Pupils identified as vulnerable learners have been prioritised for support either through timetabled "check in, catch up and prepare sessions" or within a childcare hub for respite provision. If a pupil is attending the Bridge Achievement Centre (BAC) they would be unable to access sessions on their main school site to prevent cross contamination.

Schools have made "reasonable endeavors" to support vulnerable learners to access their school or Childcare hub provision. This has included timetabling specific 1:1 staff to support, part-time placements, smaller group sizes and/or staff wearing of PPE.

Learners with ALN and Statement of SEN Provision

Schools have been advised that all learners with ALN should be risk assessed to determine the provision they require including the individualised support they need in order to access their placement and entitlement detailed within the Statement of SEN. However, learners with more profound or complex needs have required a more individualised approach to ensure they can access school and the support they need.

If the outcome of both an environmental audit and individual pupil risk assessment has determined that it is not possible or it is unsafe for the pupil to return to school, the case has been discussed with the Local

Authority. Schools have been required to evidence all alternative arrangements have been explored to mitigate any assessed risks and ensure that the pupil is not disadvantaged / discriminated against, being given every opportunity to return for designated sessions in school.

In order to ensure consistency of access of vulnerable learners in all Newport schools a risk assessment was developed and implemented to identify those learners who should be invited to attend the childcare hub. This is monitored by the Assistant Head of Education (Inclusion)

Provision of Transport

When schools partially re-open on June 29th Newport City Council prioritised the limited number of available transport for pupils with complex needs and disabilities who access either the Special Schools or Learning Resource Bases.

Where there is no provision of transport available to the Parent(s), Carer(s) or family member(s), the Local Authority will consider requests for transport where:

- (i). the child is currently in receipt of a Statement of SEN which specifies the provision of transport;
- (ii). the child is currently in receipt of a Statement of SEN which does not specify the provision of transport but whose individual needs require the LA to assess their eligibility.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Within the guidance issued by Welsh Government on 10 June 2020, it was noted that PPE is not required when undertaking routine educational activities in classroom or school settings.

The Chief Medical Officer has been clear that there is no evidence to support the widespread wearing of non-medical face coverings in the community. Non-medical face coverings have been recommended where social distancing cannot be maintained but these are not replacements for far more effective measures such as social distancing and hand hygiene. Schools should ensure that they organise their environments and they operate to ensure that social distancing can be maintained throughout a routine day.

A protocol for Vulnerable and Statemented pupils risk assessment has been developed and shared outlining the risk assessment procedures. Following the identification of a pupil with specific behaviour needs, schools have updated their current individual risk assessment / behaviour plans.

Administration of First Aid and Intimate Care

Any staff member in a school administering First Aid and/or intimate care should wear PPE. Every school has received a delivery of appropriate PPE purchased by the Local Authority.

Schools have been advised that they should support their staff if they choose to wear a face mask in school. Additionally, where it is parental choice for a pupil to wear a face covering, this should also be permitted, although parents should be informed that schools cannot be responsible for ensuring the pupil wears the mask correctly at all times during the period they are in school. School cannot retain responsibility for maintain the hygiene of the mask.

Mainstream Transport

Due to unprecedented Covid related issues mainstream pupil transport was not available when schools partially re-open on June 29th. The local authority is working to secure safe pupil transport for September and will notify schools and parents when there is more information.

In addition to the work to prioritise SEN / ALN / Special School transport, provision is being prioritised for those Welsh-medium learners in Years 11-13 for whom education is currently not available within Newport.

Education Workforce

Using current guidance and best practice, the Local Authority has set out how head teachers should manage staff attendance at school. A staffing risk assessment has been issued to schools to support the identification of which staff are able to return to work and those who should remain at home.

When schools reopened on 29th June, 77% (2400 individuals) of the school workforce was available. 173 staff were not available as they were vulnerable/shielding and unable to work from home and 380 staff were vulnerable/shielding but working from home. The remaining staff were absent due to other sickness or maternity leave.

Schools have continued to offer childcare for children of key workers, including children of education workers. Head teachers have been advised that children of their staff may need to be accommodated at the school where they work to enable staff to attend work.

Staff who believe they are unable to work due to childcare reasons have been advised to discuss this with their Headteacher who can consider some of the following options:

- Sharing childcare responsibility with a partner in two-person households
- Fully considering the age and needs of children requiring supervision
- Using key worker childcare provision where school, nursery, childminders and/or family members are not able to provide childcare across your contracted working hours
- Reduced hours on a temporary basis
- Unpaid time off for dependents
- Working flexible hours around childcare needs e.g. early mornings, evenings and weekends

The Local Authority has an employee assistance programme, [Carefirst](#), which is available 24/7. School based employees are also able to access support from the [Education Support Partnership](#) who provide mental health and wellbeing support to all education staff

Premises Management

The following documents have been devised and issued to schools:

- School Premises Recovery Checklist
- Risk Assessment for School Reopening
- Corona virus Protocol for School – Handwashing and the use of hand sanitiser
- Corona virus Protocol for School – Children who become symptomatic at school

The Local Authority has distributed hand sanitiser to all schools. The need for Perspex screens and signage will need to be determined by individual schools and local arrangements made for ordering. Advice on procurement of these and any other hygiene and cleaning products has been offered via the Procurement Team.

Catering

There has been no school meal service or breakfast club provision in schools between 29th June and 20th July. The current Free School Meal Voucher system will continue until the end of August 2020 and

thus any child attending school for the remainder of this term is required to bring with them a home packed lunch if in school over the lunchtime period.

The Free School Milk Scheme for Nursery and Foundation Phase pupils has been suspended. This will be reviewed in readiness for September 2020.

Central Education Services Support

Central Education Services recognise that minimising the number of staff on school sites can help lower transmission risks. This means that staff from central education services will not make routine visits to schools when they reopen. This includes EWOs, GEMS staff, Gwent Music tutors, Healthy Schools staff, the Inclusion Enrichment Team, the Service Children's Officer and the YEPF Officer. Central education services staff will provide telephone and email support and will also be available for MS Teams meetings.

Welsh Government guidance highlights that schools should seek to draw on the potential for engagement and collaboration with other agencies such as youth services and library services.

Pupil Attendance

Schools have been advised to keep a record of attendance and that families should notify the school if their child is unable to attend. Where children are not attending, particularly due to parental choice, Welsh Government requires schools to engage with parents/carers to understand why they are not attending and ensure there are no concerns about their well-being. The Education Welfare Service is supporting schools with this.

Schools will not be required to report on attendance targets in relation to absence for the 2019/20 academic year, or set attendance targets for the 2020/21 academic year.

Supporting Digitally Excluded Learners

A survey of Newport schools identified 2565 digitally excluded learners who did not have access to digital devices and/or a reliable internet connect. To support these learners to be able to access online learning 850 digital devices (e.g. laptops and chromebooks) were provided by schools for a repurpose and issue to learners.

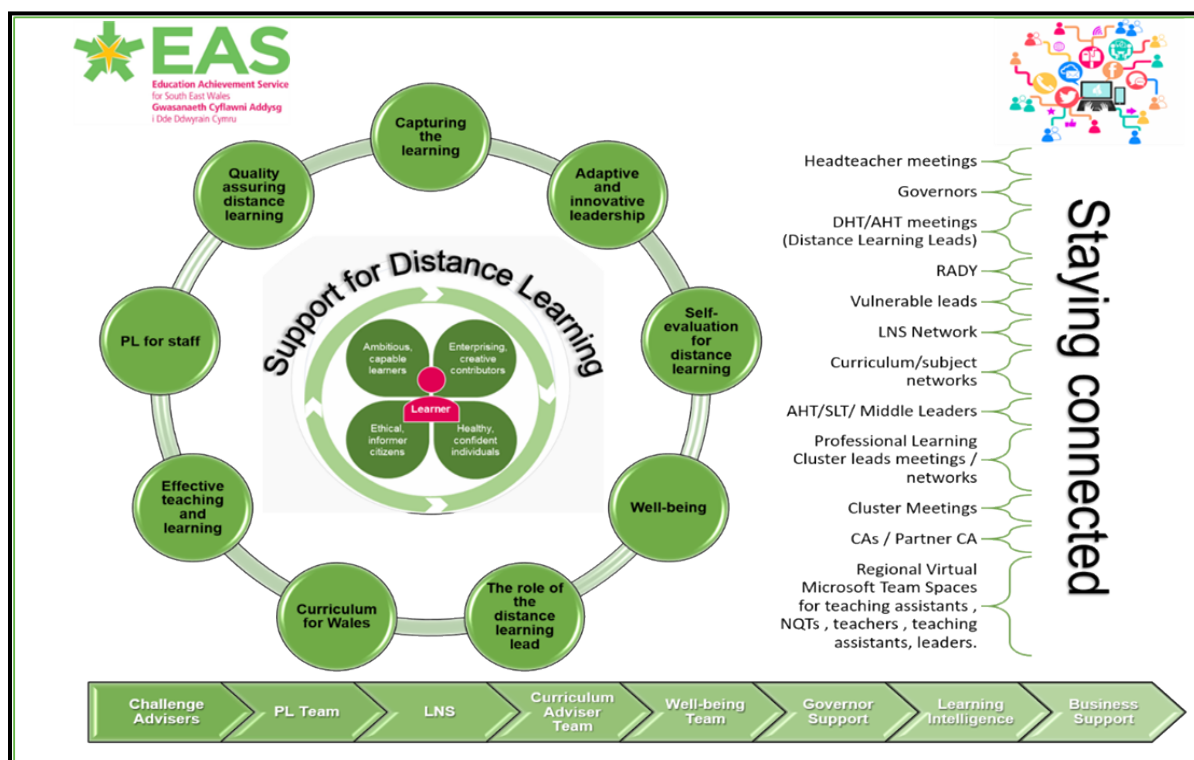
As of 23rd June, 773 devices have been refitted and loaned out to learners and 1261 MiFi units, that provide a 4G internet connection have been issued. The MiFi until support repurposed laptops or can accompany any other device that has been loaned by a school.

When returning to school, opportunities for the handling of objects between individuals have been discouraged. Schools have made use of bring your own device (BYOD) options as a way of reducing the handling of digital devices between pupils. Where relevant, schools have been advised to ask provide notice to parents that the local authority/school accepts no liability for the loss or damage to personal laptops and other equipment being used in school.

Distance Learning

The EAS has restructured its provision and communication to support over the next phase of 'Check in, catch-up, prepare' and as schools move into the return to school phase in the new academic year.

EAS have repurposed existing networks to support schools and settings in a time sensitive manner during the return to school. This is illustrated in the diagram below:



A weekly email playlist to head teachers has provided timely and responsive support to schools through the relevant phases. This included a focus on distance learning, detailing the support and resources available that are underpinned by WG guidance and most recent international research from OECD, UNESCO, UNICEF and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). This will include specific support for leaders on agreeing expectations on strategic approaches to learning.

The EAS has continued to work with schools through networks to ensure that leaders at all levels are prepared to be adaptive, creative and innovative. For all leaders, expanding the focus on wellbeing and protection has been a key priority. In addition there is a necessity to strengthen teaching and learning to service a blended approach to learning where schools may be operating on partial or otherwise adapted schedules.

Support for well-being

The well-being of staff and pupils remains of paramount importance. The EAS continue to provide resources and guidance materials for schools in supporting the recovery to school by addressing the 5 Rs: Regrouping reflection, renewal, relationships and relaxation.

Planning for learning to include support for Curriculum for Wales

The EAS has continued to support schools to supporting curriculum planning, teaching and learning in the next phase and how this relates to the guidance provided by Welsh Government. The timetable for the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales has not changed. It will still be a requirement for schools to introduce the curriculum from nursery to Year 7 in 2022. The current situation provides an opportunity for schools to trial approaches that are better aligned to the existing curriculum. As the recently published Welsh Government guidance stated, *'many of the answers for schools on the focus, flexibility, autonomy and challenges of this academic year can be found in the Curriculum for Wales guidance.'*

EAS has continued to develop online professional learning materials for senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers on Curriculum for Wales. There will also be a series of planned webinars to provide a forum to ask questions and find out more about the curriculum framework. The EAS will support schools in planning for the next academic year through published guidance, ensuring that this aligns to the frequency of contact that teachers have with learners.

Supporting effective teaching and learning

The EAS will continue to support schools in developing effective strategies for teaching and learning, in the context of distance learning. This will include the blend of some class-based learning (synchronous) and some online (synchronous and asynchronous) learning. The EAS will provide a range of guidance and professional learning for schools on what effective pedagogies could support the approach to 'blended' learning. This will include bespoke follow-up support to identified schools, including all secondary schools currently involved in the regional teaching and learning pilot programme.

Sharing Effective Practice

Based on the outcomes of the evidence gathered, a range of schools / settings will continue to be selected to create case studies of practice worth sharing, building on existing materials, in a variety of media formats. These will focus on:

- The school approach to distance learning and how this has refined overtime.
- Emerging strategies that the school/setting has employed to quality assure the distance learning provision for learners.
- The strategies for engagement of 'hard to reach' learners.
- Approaches to ensure the wellbeing of learners.

All case studies will be shared with schools and settings.

The expectation is that Head teachers and their staff will engage fully with the regional offer for distance learning and related activities.

Professional Learning

EAS will continue to provide a range of professional learning that focuses on:

- Supporting the entire workforce to meet the professional learning needs over the next academic year.
- Ensuring that all staff have the skills to support 'blended learning'. This will require a combination of an understanding of curriculum planning (based on the contact models that schools develop), the pedagogies that underpin effective 'blended' learning and the digital skills to support, structure and enhance this.
- Ensuring that all staff have the knowledge and skills to support learner well-being.

Early Years Childcare

Childcare for eligible key worker children aged 0-5 years has been available in Flying Start hubs and registered childcare providers since 14th April through the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (CCAS). This scheme will continue until August 31st for pre-school children who do not have a school place

School Cleaning

Newport Norse has managed these issues for those schools within the Service Level Agreement (SLA). There will be a need to ensure that schools with other cleaning arrangements ensure that their provider adheres to these requirements.

The redeployment of other school staff for touchpoint cleaning has been confirmed as appropriate.

Schools Maintenance

Emergency maintenance requests can continue to be facilitated through Newport Norse via the usual Helpdesk arrangements. Any site visits that are required will be risk assessed by Newport Norse to ensure that social distancing requirements are adhered to.

Statutory maintenance checks are being carried out as normal.

Financial Summary

Due to the uncertainty on the position of schools in the new academic year, commencing September 2020, it is hard to predict the financial impact. However there are a number of known issues and some assumptions which can be made.

- **Grants to schools:** A number of Welsh Government grants previously expected have been suspended. This includes 42% of a £5 million regional Professional Learning Grant. In many cases this will not cause significant issues in schools as teacher supply costs and Professional Learning expenses would not have been required during summer term although the expectation is that mitigating action will be taken and costs stopped or offset where possible. However, a minority of school may have employed an additional teacher to support the necessary backfill arrangements to support professional learning for the course of the 2020/21 financial year. This may present a financial pressure for schools unable to cease a fixed term contract.
- **PDG (Pupil Development Grant)** will not be adjusted, The PDG grant is allocated on the PLASC 2019 eFSM pupil numbers. There is no additional grant being provided in 2020/21 to reflect newly entitled FSM pupils as a result of COVID.
- **COVID 19 Claims to support local authorities:** Expenditure above what would be 'normally be expected' could be claimed from this Welsh Government fund. During school closures (March 20th- June 26th) , 36 childcare hubs operated across the city and on occasions operated outside of the school day or during school holidays. Hubs required regular cleaning and caretaking. Individual school claims were made against this fund. Other Covid19 19 claims included:
 - Special Schools Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for care package.
 - PPE kits for 57 schools medical rooms (for potential contact with symptomatic pupils or staff).
 - Free School Meals vouchers (£19.50 fortnightly vouchers for approximately 5400 pupils)
 - Focussed cleaning for hub provisions and for school buildings which had remained unopened for the previous three months.
 - Bulk purchasing of hand sanitiser for all schools.

Schools which re-opened on June 29th have a high cleaning requirements. In some circumstances additional cleaning staff have been temporarily employed. Other schools have instigated overtime payments to existing cleaning staff. The school term is due to finish on July 17th, this equates to 13 working school days during July. At present there is no COVID 19 fund operating beyond June 30th to claim for these additional costs. Education Services have agreed to pay for this additional cleaning but this is not sustainable for the longer term.

- **Other financial issues and risks**

- Some costs to schools, e.g. utilities or capitation costs, may have reduced compared to planned budgets, this can be utilised by schools to offset any in year increase resulting from recovery and return to school
- Under the current LA sickness compensation scheme, there is no compensation for the first 15 days so there is a risk of increased supply cover within schools, for example where staff may need to self-isolate. There is also an increased risk the supply scheme will overspend and this will impact the bottom line of schools at year end as there will be insufficient to cover this within any remaining contingency budget.
- Special and SEN transport falls under Education services, currently the assumption is that the underspend created by the 75% contracted payments during closures will offset any increase in spend to the end of the financial year based on the position at May 2020. However, when a decision on the return of schools in September and transport arrangements required to facilitate this a pressure may be created
- Net free school meal costs for voucher provision has been recovered through the WG fund which currently ceases at the end of August 2020. Plans for catering provision from September 2020 have yet to be confirmed and currently Chartwells staff, NCC's catering contract provider, are furloughed.

Risks

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
The Council is not able to deliver its strategic objectives set in the Corporate Plan.	High	Medium	Setting Strategic Aims will enable the Council to focus and respond to the Covid 19 health emergency. Council monitoring and reporting processes will support the delivery of the Strategic Aims and Corporate Plan.	Corporate Management Team / Heads of Service.
The Council is not able to respond and protect its residents as a result of future Covid 19 outbreaks	High	Medium	The Council's Gold Command arrangements will remain in place to respond and manage any future outbreaks. Collaborative and partnership working with the Local Resilience Forum will ensure coordination of resources and services to respond to future outbreaks.	Corporate Management Team / Gold Command.

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

The school recovery programme set out in this report will support the Council's Corporate Plan 2017-22. This is also aligned to the Public Services Board, One Newport Wellbeing Plan 2018-23 and Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Options Available and considered

The options available to Cabinet:

1. To endorse the school recovery plan
2. Reject the school recovery plan

Preferred Option and Why

Option 1 is preferred, as this will enable the Council to provide way forward for its Members, staff, service users and partners as the Council responds to the Covid 19 health emergency.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

Where schools have incurred additional costs up to June 2020, as a direct result of Covid 19, these have been submitted to WG for recovery through the Covid19 relief fund.

The relief fund is planned to stop at 30 June 2020, though this may change as further funding is made available to the Welsh Government. Until that is confirmed, any further additional costs incurred as a direct result of Covid 19 will need to be borne by the school from this point. Education Services have agreed to absorb the cost of additional cleaning for the 3 week reopening of schools to the end of the academic year; this is approx. £10k for Norse SLA schools and the additional non-SLA schools is still to be confirmed.

The financial position of schools is very challenging and an overspend beyond current level of school reserves was forecasted, even before Covid-19. This would mean that other Council budgets and/or reserves would need to fund this, which would have serious impacts themselves.

A key development in going forward is to provide as much clarity on the financial consequences of the issues which are outlined above, as soon as possible.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no specific legal issues arising from the Report. The schools recovery programme is in accordance with Welsh Government and Public Health Wales guidance and based on individual risk assessments.

Comments of Head of People and Business Change

The School Recovery Programme set out in this report provides a comprehensive strategic approach to allow schools to commence safe operation whilst continuing to support the Council's Corporate Plan aims, which were reframed in the post COVID-19 Strategic Recovery Aims document agreed in the June meeting of cabinet. This approach is based on a set of guiding principles intended to balance the safety and wellbeing of children, families, staff and communities during the COVID-19 emergency with the longer-term impacts on pupils and their learning.

School Recovery has followed significant engagement and collaboration with partners led by the Executive School Planning Group and is underpinned by a wide range of policies, procedures and health and safety measures. The Programme also reflects a strong focus on responding to the needs of vulnerable learners and those likely to be most affected by COVID-19 preventative measures e.g. supporting digitally excluded learners, prioritising transport for year 11-13 Welsh medium learners (who are educated in Pontypool).

Where possible, the local authority has promoted a consistent approach in the 'offer' to Newport pupils returning to school, with individual schools completing risk assessments to reflect their specific circumstances, which must be agreed by school governing bodies.

Comments of Cabinet Member

I am extremely proud of our school staff for their professionalism, dedication and responsiveness to the Covid 19 pandemic. Within days of closing in March a significant number of childcare hubs for children of critical workers and vulnerable learners were in operation alongside the provision of distance learning. In addition to this, schools are supporting pupils transitioning to secondary school and to post-16 opportunities.

A total of thirty-six childcare hubs operated across the city enabling children to access childcare in their community. Since schools reopened on 29th June around 400 children have continued to attend childcare each day enabling critical workers to attend employment. It has been challenging for schools to provide this service whilst also offering other children the ability to attend school to check in and catch up with school staff, whilst following their risk assessments which promote the safety of all on site.

There remain a number of key areas to address. Provision of school transport, whilst adhering to social distancing requirements, poses a significant challenge, particularly for those learners attending Welsh Medium, Special and Catholic schools. Whilst some transport is in place, further is required for the autumn term.

Almost 800 digital and around 1260 MiFi units devices have been issued to families to support distance learning. Additionally, a school wifi network that allows children and young people to bring their own devices to school (BYOD) has been established. Building on this success remains a priority.

Pupil attendance at schools has not been compulsory since schools reopening on 29th June and attendance at individual schools has varied from between around 30% to 90%. Schools have been supported to implement expert advice to keep pupils and staff safe. A priority now is that we work with our communities to build their confidence in returning as many learners to school as possible.

Local issues

None

Scrutiny Committees

Under the Council's Constitution, powers have been delegated to Heads of Service and since the Covid 19 outbreak governance arrangements including the Council's Scrutiny Committees have been suspended. However, there is every intention as the Council re-instates its democratic and governance functions, the Council's Scrutiny Committees will be provided an opportunity to assess and review the contents of this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment and the Equalities Act 2010

The equality impact of Covid19 and its long-term implications for communities is significant. The regulatory body, Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has recently informed public services that their scrutiny activity during this period will focus on how public sector organisations are effectively considering the equality impact of decisions, planning and policymaking. The EHRC has also announced that they will be undertaking a formal inquiry into the disproportionate impact of Covid19 on minority ethnic communities, and the structural inequalities that have contributed to this.

Key community and equality impacts that will need to be considered both at a strategic and operational level and are highlighted within the Community Impact Assessment (CIA) and in a Fairness and Equalities Impact Assessment (FEIA) specifically on the reopening of schools include:

- The complex and disproportionate impact that Covid19 has had on our Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities
- The trust and confidence levels that communities have in local authority and wider public sector/government services as a result of the Covid19 response
- Mental health and wellbeing across communities, but particularly those who have experienced loss or increased isolation during the pandemic

- The impact of school closures on our most vulnerable learners
- Building future resilience for those communities who are most affected – focussing work to address issues like material poverty, institutional inequalities, digital exclusion and poor health which have been compounded and highlighted by the crisis

Children and Families (Wales) Measure

At the heart of the Council's Strategic Recovery aims is the objective to *Promote and protect the health and wellbeing of people, safeguarding our most vulnerable, and building strong, resilient communities.* Safeguarding vulnerable children, young people and families remains an important part of Council's services. The findings and recommendations from the Fairness and Equalities Impact Assessment and the Community Impact Assessment and future studies into the impact of Covid 19 on communities and society in Wales will inform and direct the prioritisation of services.

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The NCC Strategic Recovery Aims support the Council's Corporate Plan 2017-22, Public Services Board 'One Newport' Wellbeing Plan 2018-23 and the Wellbeing for Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The delivery of these strategic aims and actions, within which the reopening of school is included, will ensure that the Council is able to respond in the short term to the Covid 19 emergency but also ensure that we are able to prevent longer term impacts on the children and their education.

Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Not applicable

Background Papers

Public Services Board, One Newport Wellbeing Plan 2018-23
Corporate Plan 2017-22

Dated: 9th July 2020