

FULL COUNCIL

7 JULY 2020

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

1. COUNCIL UPDATE REGARDING DECISIONS

1.1 Purpose of Report

To advise Members that a decision making sessions was held virtually on 24 March and 28th May 2020.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 This report highlights some of those decisions which have been made, but not all. Members wishing to view all decisions made can find these at:

<http://eservices.solihull.gov.uk/mgInternet/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

1.2.2 Attached to this report is a list of decisions made.

1.3 Decisions

1.3.1 The substantive report considered on 24th March was to approve the creation of a new Secondary Age additionally resourced provision for Key Stage 3 pupils with Social, Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) needs at Tudor Grange Academy. The proposal had been the subject of consultation with schools and parents and the intention was to commission places from September 2020.

1.3.2 Because Tudor Grange is an Academy the proposal would also need approval from the Schools Commissioner through submission of a Business Case and I agreed that officers should support the school in making this.

1.3.3 The consultation had demonstrated strong support and this is a provision that will help to meet the needs of vulnerable young people, so I was pleased to approve the proposal.

1.3.4 The session on 28th May was specifically to approve the Council's proposed position statement and overarching principles for the opening of schools to more pupils as part of the government proposals to ease the lockdown and start reopening classes for primary age children in Year 1 and Year 6 on a phased basis from 1st June 2020.

1.3.5 Whilst there had been considerable national debate and difficulties in some areas to agree a position with schools and staff unions, we are fortunate that in Solihull our school leaders, union representatives and council officers work together amicably and constructively. The report outlined the council's position statement and overarching principles for the wider re-opening of schools across the borough.

1.3.6 Based on the extensive consultation I agreed that the position for individual schools was the responsibility of its Head and Governors and that whilst schools should be encouraged to adhere to government guidelines as far as is practicable, they should be fully supported to adopt a different and phased approach to opening based on their own individual circumstances following completion of their own risk assessment. This may include part-time provision for some pupils.

- 1.3.7 Included with the report was a Coronavirus (COVID-19): Health and Safety Risk Assessment checklist template that had been drawn up by officers. Using the latest Government guidance, it has been produced to help schools prepare for reopening for a wider range of pupils. This was well received and has been seen more widely as a model of good practice, so is a credit to our staff and the approach taken to support our schools.
- 1.3.8 A proportion of our primary schools opened for the specified year groups on 1st June (the earliest date allowed by government) and almost all by the following week. The number attending is increasing steadily as parents gain confidence over classroom safety and it is hoped that some schools will be able to also take children from other year groups before the end of the summer term.

1.4 Council Plan and Priorities

- 1.4.1 The policies, current services and future plans are all designed to support the council Plan and its priorities for children, young people and families, with a focus on ensuring equality of opportunity and meeting the needs of vulnerable children and disadvantaged groups.

1.5 Good News and Issues of Interest

- 1.5.1 The Covid-19 epidemic restrictions have impacted considerably on Children's Services, Education and Skills, as they have for all departments within the council. I cannot emphasise enough the brilliant work of our staff in maintaining services or of our teachers who helped to keep schools open (even through the holidays) for the children of key workers and for our most vulnerable pupils. There have been many message of praise from parents for the dedication shown by teaching staff and the assistance that teachers have provided for home learning. There have been some brilliant videos produced to lift spirits and our care staff have worked tirelessly to support vulnerable families and bring some cheer during these difficult time.
- 1.5.2 The lock-down restrictions have raised a number of concerns about vulnerable families coping with isolation and the frustrations and stress that could impact on the lives of children. This is of national concern, as is the reported increase in domestic violence within homes. The number of children coming into care has increased and the suspension of court services continues to delay the planned return of some children to their wider family and permanence arrangements for others.
- 1.5.3 From my recent meeting with Lead Members from other local authorities there was real concern about mental health issues arising from being confined at home or loss of employment has placed additional strain on many families. That is also a local concern but in Solihull there has been outstanding support from Solar, the Mental Health Trust and other support organisations, again with many messages of appreciation from those who have been helped.
- 1.5.4 Shortly before lock-down I was pleased to present SENCO award certificates to staff working in many Early Years settings who had completed their training in supporting children with SEND.

1.6 Future Decisions

- 1.6.1 Recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 emergency will create additional work for Children's Services, the Skills Division and Schools. Much will be guided by decisions to be made at national level but plans are already under way towards recovery and through the capital programme progress is being made towards creation of additional capacity for SEND provision and the expansion of some schools to meet local needs.