

Covid-19 Update – Learning

Date: 15th September 2021

Report of: The Director of Children and Families

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- As the city continues to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, this report provides the Children and Families Scrutiny Board with an update on the focused work being undertaken to support learning settings to support the learning of children and young people in Leeds.
- The report summarises the most recent changes to the Department for Education's (DfE) guidance, at the time of writing, with regards to changes in how learning settings should be operating e.g., risk assessments, test and trace.
- In addition, this report offers an update to members to reassure that local authority officers have continued to provide support and resources to children, families and learning settings, as detailed at previous board meetings, throughout the summer and will continue to do so in September and beyond.
- Finally, as board members will be aware, [The Best Council Plan](#) has the aspiration for Leeds to be a child-friendly city. The [Leeds Children and Young People's Plan](#) (CYPP) explains this child friendly approach in greater detail and sets out eleven priority areas of work and three key obsessions. The third obsession is to *improve achievement, attainment, and attendance in learning settings*. To deliver on this obsession, the [3As Strategy](#) was developed in 2018.
- There will be significant, immediate, and longer-term impacts of Covid-19 on the health, wellbeing and learning of our children and young people. It is recognised that some groups have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and the decision has been taken to reframe the 3As Strategy in the context of Covid-19.
- Within the reframed strategy, there will be a focus, within the priorities, on young people with SEND, those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from BAME communities, and also to seek to understand and remove the barriers to their success in learning.
- Once completed, the new set of priorities will be established, the 3As Strategy will be refreshed and the appropriate actions taken in pursuit of achieving those priorities.
- This report summarises the information captured during the consultations with learning settings across the city, which took place in July 2021.

Recommendations

- a) Scrutiny Board members are asked to have a full and informed discussion around the information in this report. Local authority officers will be present at the board meeting to provide appropriate inputs and to respond to questions.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 With many children and young people returning to learning settings at the beginning of the academic year, the Scrutiny Board meeting on 15th September provides a timely opportunity for board members to be informed of the current DfE guidance into how settings are now operating and how the local authority is supporting them.
- 2 During the pandemic, Scrutiny Board has received regular updates from Children and Families Services on the numerous avenues of support being offered to children, families and learning settings. In addition to the information provided in this report, officers will have the opportunity to verbally update board members of the main areas of focus at the time of the board meeting.
- 3 The impact of the pandemic has been significant, and it is recognised that some groups have been disproportionately affected. Consultation with learning settings on reframing the 3As Strategy will be influential in shaping how Children and Families Services directs resources moving forwards in response to the challenges brought about by Covid-19. As such, the Scrutiny Board meeting on 15th September provides an opportunity to inform board members of the information captured during the consultation sessions with learning settings in July 2021.

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

What impact will this proposal have?

- 4 The Government's Covid guidance has a significant impact into the way that learning settings operate. The most recent changes to the guidance for schools, including early years settings within a school, is summarised here:
 - a) There is no longer the need to keep children and staff in discrete bubbles that do not mix.
 - b) Settings are no longer expected to undertake test and trace for close contacts of positive cases and inform them to isolate. This will be done by NHS test and trace. NHS test and trace may contact settings to assist them in identifying close contacts in 'exceptional circumstances'.
 - c) Close contacts of positive cases are no longer required to self-isolate if:
 - (1) they are fully vaccinated
 - (2) they are below the age of 18 years and 6 months
 - (3) they have taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial
 - (4) they are not able to be vaccinated for medical reasons
 - d) All close contacts that are not symptomatic are advised to have a PCR test (unless under the age of 5) unless they have had a positive PCR in the last 90 days.
 - e) Face coverings are no longer required to be worn in settings by children or staff – however officers have advised that persons still have personal choice, may need to continue to wear one as part of an individual risk assessment and that visitors may still be asked to wear them. This is in line with the government expectation and recommendation that persons wear face coverings in enclosed crowded spaces where they may be within the proximity of people they would not normally come into contact with.

- f) Social distancing is no longer required; however, schools have been advised that staff should distance where possible from visitors or persons they would not normally come into contact with, in line with the Government's expectation that people still try to minimise contacts.
 - g) Hygiene, ventilation, and cleaning controls are still in place, so these remain in the sample Covid-19 risk assessment for schools.
 - h) Settings are expected to have an Outbreak Management Plan which details the measures they may need to re-instate, on advice from Public Health or Government, and an action plan for doing so.
- 5 At previous Scrutiny Board meetings, officers have provided details of the support being offered to learning settings during the pandemic. During consultation at The Big Learning Conversations, participants were extremely positive about the support they have had from the local authority during such unprecedented challenging times. Of note has been the support offered through the Health and Safety Team and how effective the communication has been from the Director of Children and Families Services.
- 6 As we move into September, there are plans to continue the regular bulletins which will come from the newly appointed Deputy Director for Learning. Similarly, the regular support meetings, led by senior officers within Children and Families, will continue to offer a space where leaders of learning settings from across the city can ask questions directly to a wide variety of supporting local authority officers. The single point of access for contact with Children and Families Services Directorate, the DCS Alert Inbox, will also continue to offer a direct route into the local authority for those settings informing the team about Covid cases and to seek quick responses to Covid related queries.
- 7 The Schools' Health and Safety Team has provided the following update on the support being offered to schools and early years settings in schools:
- a) The whole school sample Covid-19 risk assessment has been reviewed, had union consultation, and was issued to schools before the end of last term. There are a few minor amendments needed following guidance changes over the summer and an updated version will be issued at the start of next term. None of the changes materially affect how schools are to operate, at the time of writing.
 - b) An amended Covid-19 risk assessment and Safe Systems of Work document has been produced to enable Children Services' staff, working in and with schools, to return to 'normal operation' and resume many of the services, in September, that had been put on hold or greatly reduced e.g., face to face training, home visits, school visits, face to face meetings etc.
 - c) A sample Outbreak Management Plan and Action Plan has been produced and was provided to schools at the end of last term. This follows the government contingency framework. The framework was updated, in the week commencing 18th August, to require action plans which had already been included. Some minor changes are required, and the sample plan will be updated at the beginning of next term.
 - d) Schools have been sending in their notification of positive cases and this will continue to be requested, as this allows the local authority to identify potential outbreaks and provide support in a timely manner without waiting for contact from Public Health England (PHE). This data will continue to be fed into Leeds City Council Public Health's city wide Covid case tracking system, HP Star.
 - e) Weekly Outbreak Management meetings will continue with Leeds City Council Public Health, Health and Safety, Environmental Health, Early Years and Adult Services colleagues and the Local PHE Team to identify potential outbreaks and settings of concern and what support and / or action is needed.

- f) Fortnightly meetings of the Test, Trace & Outbreak Management – Early Years & Schools group will continue to identify guidance and support needed across the board for those settings and pro-active work that can be undertaken. This group includes colleagues from Leeds City Council’s Learning Improvement, Public Health, Early Years, Health and Safety and Communications Teams.
 - g) Pro-active and reactive Covid support audits will continue, and the audit has been updated to reflect the new guidance.
 - h) Regular bulletins from the Schools Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team (and the Director of Children and Families) will continue.
 - i) Regular joint meetings with school leadership and Leeds City Council officers will continue to allow issues to be shared and discussed and a consistent approach adopted.
 - j) Telephone, email, and onsite support will continue to be provided.
 - k) Legislation and guidance changes will continue to be tracked and any necessary document / advice changes will continue to be communicated as before, via the risk assessments reviews, bulletins, flow charts, letters, emails etc.
- 8 Each early years’ setting, school, academy, and college will have its own priorities and development plans. The refreshed 3As Strategy will provide details of how the council’s Children and Families Services Directorate will focus its work to shape, influence, support, and challenge learning settings in supporting children and young people’s learning.
- 9 Children and Families Services will maintain its existing partnerships with other directorates and look to develop new partnerships where appropriate within the local authority as well as with external organisations, in pursuit of achieving the priorities of the refreshed 3As Strategy.
- 10 The resources being mobilised in pursuit of achieving the refreshed priorities will not solely come from colleagues working directly in learning but from across the Children and Families Services directorate and beyond.
- 11 Reframing the 3As Strategy is in its consultation phase and officers have already had the opportunity to run consultation sessions with learning settings across the city, called The Big Learning Conversation. Leaders of learning settings gave their views on a vast range of priorities. This report gives details of the overall sense of the priorities and aims, which have reinforced the strategic view of Children and Families Services Leadership Team. More detail of these consultation sessions can be found in the Consultation and Engagement section of this report.
- 12 The finalised priorities of the refreshed strategy will be selected to be areas of focus where Children and Families Services can have most impact in supporting learning settings in supporting children and young people’s learning in the context of Covid-19.
- 13 The substantial impact of the pandemic on families in Leeds has meant that it has been necessary to refresh and reframe the priorities within the 3As Strategy. Along with looking at outcomes data, the following themes have been drawn from The Big Learning Conversations with leaders of learning settings from across Leeds, with comments from the leaders themselves:
- a) All children make the best start to each stage of their learning.**
 - i. *“Early years is key. Learning starts at birth”*
 - ii. *“Focus on transitions. Nursery to school, primary to secondary and on to post-16”.*
 - b) Schools are supported to reduce the number of permanent and fixed term exclusions.**
 - i. *“Exclusions remains a priority and should be focused on to what we are doing to include”.*

- c) All children have opportunities to take part in sports, arts, and positive activities.**
 - i. "Children have been deprived of arts and extra-curricular activities over lockdown, all of which are essential to young people's development".*
- d) Children and young people educated outside mainstream schools and settings receive support and succeed.**
- e) All children and staff working in learning settings are supported with their wellbeing.**
 - i. "Further focus on mental health and wellbeing is needed, for staff as well as for children and young people".*
 - ii. "Staff are burnt out and there is a need for a focus on staff wellbeing".*
- f) The needs of children and young people from BAME communities are understood and they are supported to do well.**
 - i. "There are inequalities for BAME communities which require immediate focus".*
- g) All children in Leeds are proficient readers.**
 - i. "It has to be about storytelling, language development, story books and images, and developing vocabulary".*
 - ii. "Reading skills are key to quality lifelong learning".*
- h) Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families receive timely and appropriate support which enables them to thrive.**
 - i. "The SEND Strategy is key. We need, as a city, all children to be accessing the right places for their needs – provide the opportunities for learning that those children need including specialist where needed".*
- i) The needs of disadvantaged children are met, and they are supported to do well.**
 - i. "We have to be focusing on the disadvantaged and children with Pupil Premium. There's got to be a sharing of best practise around this from school to school and how we can make better use of this funding".*

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 14 Consultation to reframe the 3As Strategy began with events for learning settings across the city and for all ages from 0 – 19. Four consultations took place, each focusing on an age range: early years, primary, secondary (incl special schools and alternative provisions) and post-16.
- 15 The sessions were called The Big Learning Conversations.
- 16 The sessions were led by the Director of Children and Families Services, via Zoom, and were well attended. During the sessions the participants were split into breakout rooms and explored the following areas:
 - a) As a result of the pandemic, participants were asked what areas of the present 3As strategy they found to be the most important and have the most impact in transforming children's lives?
 - b) Participants were asked for their views on additional areas which should be included in the reframed learning strategy in the context of Covid-19.
 - c) In their work with children and young people, participants were asked how the local authority can best support the education community.
- 17 The information captured from the breakout rooms was collated and cross-referenced and the key themes are detailed earlier in this report.
- 18 In addition, and in response to the 'business as usual' away from the refreshed strategy, Bronze Meetings have taken place for primary, secondary, and special schools, throughout the pandemic, led by the Head of Service for Learning Improvement and other senior officers from

the Learning Improvement Service. The meetings have offered leaders of schools and settings from across the city, the opportunity to discuss key and current issues about the pandemic. The sessions have been attended by relevant officers from the local authority, e.g. health and safety, human resources, communications, the attendance service etc. Their presence has enabled attendees to ask questions on a wide variety of subjects and to regularly receive an immediate response.

What are the resource implications?

- 19 Given the significance of the financial implications of Covid-19, arrangements are in place for the Council's Executive Board to receive separate and more detailed reports regularly. The Council's Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board maintains oversight of the financial management strategy in accordance with its remit.
- 20 The Covid-19 pandemic is unprecedented and as such, Children and Families Services has redeployed resources to areas of need with the highest priority. Similarly, the reframed 3As Strategy will set out its new aims and resources will be deployed appropriately to ensure support can be given where the most impact can be made for children, families and learning settings across Leeds, with a focus on those who have been disproportionately affected.

What are the legal implications?

- 21 This report has no specific legal implications.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 22 The risks related to Covid-19 will continue to be monitored through the Council's existing risk management processes.
- 23 Children and Families Services has business continuity plans across 20 key areas of the directorate and many of these plans inform the critical responses to Covid-19.
- 24 Children and Families Services Leadership Team and the Learning Leadership Team will monitor the progress of the refreshed 3As Strategy and the actions which sit below it and will regularly assess the risks associated with the implementation of the strategy.

Does this proposal support the council's three Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Climate Emergency

- 25 Providing the right support at the right time, the local authority enables children, families and learning settings to succeed. This in turn will have the potential to have a significant positive influence within the Inclusive Growth Strategy for Leeds as children and young people who enter apprenticeships and into working life will add their wealth of talents in contributing to the city's economic growth.
- 26 Work continues to promote energy efficiency and eco-awareness with schools, students and with families. There are likely to be environmental impacts associated with the pandemic that will become clearer over time. It is important to focus on the longer-term impacts of Covid-19 on the climate emergency. Where current changes how work is undertaken, how schooling is delivered and where support is offered to children and families, there are potential opportunities for carbon saving efficiencies. This potential is being balanced against the determination to continue to deliver high quality services.
- 27 The Health and Wellbeing of staff within learning settings, as well as the children and young people who attend them, will undoubtedly be amongst the refreshed aims of the 3As Strategy. Through consultation with learning settings during the Big Learning Conversations, it was evident that the mental health of people across the city has suffered because of the pandemic. Mental

and physical health are intrinsically linked and learning settings have already created plans in how to improve the wellbeing of every child, young person, and adult within their learning community. Children and Families Services is investigating the best ways of supporting settings to support their staff and the children and young people who attend their settings.

Timescales and measuring success

How will success be measured?

28 Once the consultation process has been completed, each of the newly refreshed aims within the 3As Strategy will have measurable targets to determine the impact of the work being undertaken by the local authority.

What is the timetable for implementation?

29 The 3As Strategy runs until the end of 2023, however, each of the measurable targets, once approved, will have its own timeframe for completion, implementation, delivery, and monitoring.

30 It is proposed to bring regular updates to the Scrutiny Board in order that members can see progress being made against the approved aims of the refreshed strategy.

Appendices

31 None.

Background papers

32 None.