

## **Note of meeting**

### **Consultative Committee with Parents**

**6.00pm, Wednesday 24 June 2020**

**Virtual Meeting - via Microsoft Teams**

#### **Present:**

##### **Elected Members**

Councillors Ian Perry (Convener). Alison Dickie (Vice-Convener), Councillor Eleanor Bird and Councillor Mary Campbell.

#### **Locality Groups Representatives**

##### **North East Locality**

Ellen Grunewald (Duddingston Primary School Parent Council)  
Laura Brown (Leith Academy Parent Council)

##### **North West Locality**

Billy Samuel (Corstorphine Primary Parent Council)  
Chris Davidson (Royal High School Parent Council)  
Rebecca Clacy-Jones (Laura Stephenson Primary Parent Council)  
Lynn Adamson (Ferryhill Primary Parent Council)  
Sarah Ginede, (Ferryhill Primary Parent Council)

##### **South East Locality**

Alex Ramage (Education Children & Families Committee Parent Representative)  
Kate Morris, (Boroughmuir High School Parent Council)  
Carrie Galloway (Bruntsfield Primary Parent Council)  
Josephine Beach-Brandt, (St Peter's RC Primary Parent Council and St Thomas's of Aquins High School)

##### **South West Locality**

Gareth Oakley (Craiglockhart Primary School Parent Council)  
Naomi Barton (Currie Community High School Parent Council)  
Kevin Kealey (Nether Currie Primary School Parent Council)  
Lee Picken (Juniper Green Primary School Parent Council)  
Alison Nicolson (Redhall Special School Parent Council)

## **Connect**

Eileen Prior

### **Officers in Attendance**

Alistair Gaw, Executive Director for Communities and Families

Andy Gray, Head of Schools and Lifelong Learning,

Bernadette Oxley, Head of Children's Services

Crawford McGhie, Senior Manager – Estates and Operational Support

Lorna Sweeney, Schools and Lifelong Learning Senior Manager

Lynn Paterson, Senior Education Manager, Early Years and Primary Schools

Michelle McMillan, Operations Manager, Communities and Families

Sean Bell, Senior Manager, Children with Additional Support Needs

Jack Simpson, Senior Education Officer, Communities and Families

Natalie Le Couteur, Committee Services

Blair Ritchie, Committee Services,

Laura Millar, Service and Policy Adviser to the Convener and Vice-Convener of Education, Children and Families

## **1. Introduction from Convener, Vice-Convener and Executive Director for Communities and Families**

The Convener introduced the meeting and referred to the announcement from the Scottish Government that all pupils would be returning to school 100% full-time in August. The Local Authority had been asked by the Scottish Government to provide a report to Education Scotland on how it would achieve 50% attendance and to outline the plan for that. This plan was being submitted to the Policy and Sustainability Committee which would take place on 25 June 2020. The decision was taken not to circulate the report amongst membership of the Consultative Committee with Parents (CCWP), so as not to cause confusion. The report which was now outdated was based on 50% attendance and the funding from the Scottish Government was based on that figure. The plan would then have to be revised to show what the plan was for 100% attendance. CCWP members were invited to review the plan which was now outdated. Although the plan for 50% attendance had been superseded by the announcement from the Scottish Government, the report was still valid as the First Minister's announcement was caveated by the statement saying that if the infection rate was to change, then the plan would need to be amended. That meant that if the Local Authority had to reduce the hours of attendance, the original plan for 50% attendance would be the default position.

The Vice-Convener indicated that she was very conscious of the detrimental impact of the lockdown on children, young people, parents and schools. It would be very difficult to ensure that two metres distance was observed in a city with over 50,000 pupils, rising rolls capacity, budget cuts and other challenges. It was a relief to hear the statement from the Scottish Government on the intention to deliver a full return to school in August 2020. It was now necessary to build confidence with all parties to get structures and

guidelines in place and communication was vital for this. The report would be submitted to the Committee tomorrow, which meant if there was spike in virus, there was a contingency plan in place. With the return to school, the focus should be on the children, who already faced many challenges. Wellbeing had to be at the heart of this for every child, with special consideration given to those with special needs and autism. Preparing children for their return to school required working together and good communication. There should be a clearer plan, aiming at 100% attendance but with a contingency plan in place.

The Executive Director for Communities and Families reported that events were moving rapidly. He was delighted that the schools should be opening on 12 August, with 100% attendance. The Authority had great ambitions for the quality of teaching in Edinburgh and he knew that parents and staff would have to trust in the measures being put in place. The Delivery Phasing Plan was a substantial document and focused on there being 50% attendance in August. A considerable amount of work had been put in to this and was still relevant. There were critical areas such as risk assessment, infection control and cleaning regimes, to ensure that schools would be safe. However, the contingency plan was Plan B. Plan A required extensive work to prepare schools for 12 August. This also included staffing, cleaning and infection control. The needs of children had to be addressed to ensure a high quality of education. Staff had been working hard and parents should be assured that matters were well in hand. The Authority would be working over the summer and would be providing updates to parents. It should be remembered that 100% attendance was conditional on the continual control of the virus and Phase 4 being reached. Control of the virus was progressing well at present, but it was necessary to plan for an overall increase or localised outbreaks. This was a daunting prospect for staff and parents and the Local Authority would work hard to provide the necessary assurance.

### **Decision**

- 1) There was commitment to keeping parents updated throughout the summer and to note the aspiration that information would be presented in advance to Parent Council Chairs and Headteachers.
- 2) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the Council's website would be updated on an ongoing basis. Letters would be issued if there was a significant change to current assumptions on return to school arrangements.
- 3) Communications would be via the text alert service and by the Council website. It was expected that these would be fortnightly in frequency over the summer.

## **2. Learning in School**

The Head of Schools and Lifelong Learning provided an update on learning in schools and indicated that the statement from the Scottish Government was very interesting and would probably be greeted with a mixture of joy and concern by some parents. This was a time that the Local Authority would have to think carefully about opening schools. Previously, staff and pupils returned to school after the holidays to a situation with which they were familiar but even with 100% attendance, pupils would be going back to

a different environment. The Local Authority was expecting guidelines from the Government to ensure a safe environment in all schools to provide the highest quality of teaching possible. This would require planning and clarity in risk assessments. If the trajectory for controlling the virus improved, all children should return to school on 12 August. There were issues to consider. Even if the 50% attendance model was adopted, there would probably be staffing gaps. To address this, the First minister suggested that all probationers, previously appointed during the 2019 and 2020 school year should be re-appointed to make up the gap. It was not possible to be certain about the actual gap at present, as the situation might change. The Local Authority was assuming that all children were going back to school in August and was basing its assessment on what was in place in the context of 100% attendance. This included ensuring that cleaning regimes for 50% could meet the requirements for 100%. It was necessary to ensure that parents would be informed as the facts became available, as clarity had been hard to establish over last 12 weeks. Taking account of the current situation with the virus, there might need to be additional requirements in each school. The Authority was committed to providing accurate information to parents throughout the summer by ensuring regular updates to parents and parent council chairs. There was a need to ensure that children were as safe as possible and there was awareness of the traumatic circumstances that children and parents had endured over the last three months. Consequently, health and mental wellbeing should be a priority for the return to school.

### **Decision**

To note the update.

## **3. Feedback on Parental Concerns**

The Convener then invited questions from the parents. During the questions and answers session, the following points were raised:

### Contingency plans

- The way in which contingency plans could be triggered.
- The way in which the Schools Operating Risk Toolkit (SORT) operated.
- Possible further school closures in the event of a further outbreak of the virus.
- The assessment of all high-risk children in the city.
- Ensuring proper transitioning arrangements.

### Effective communication

- That there should be on-going accurate communication with parents.
- It should be made clear that communication was coming from the Council and not individual schools.
- That head teachers were included in the process.

### Ensuring the proper cleaning regimes

- That Private Finance Initiative (PFI) service providers would maintain the necessary, enhanced cleaning environment.

- Funding should be available to ensure that the cleaning regime was applied.
- That the guidance on standards was sent directly to parents.
- To ensure safety in the new environment, there had to be risk assessments.
- Extensive preparation had taken place to ensure safety, including briefing sessions on SORT.
- Guidance had been provided from the Scottish Government and Health Protection Scotland.

#### Preparations for an increase in the virus

- Whether it could be confirmed which questions on the council website applied to the 100 percent model and which to the 50 percent model.
- The type of contingency arrangements for risk management.
- The measures required for a spike in the virus in schools.
- That the contingency plans for delivering teaching, made prior to the 100% attendance announcement, were still in place.

#### Blended learning and digital learning

- All head teachers had planned their blended learning policy and strategy, which was a mixture of in-school, outdoor and on-line learning.
- If there was a return to lockdown, the Council had long-term strategies in place which included blended learning and implementing the Delivery Phasing Plan.
- The need for high quality tools to deal with these issues and for training.
- The Council was committed towards a new digital learning strategy.
- Whether consideration was being given for a hub where teachers could share resources.
- How blended learning would affect the home learning aspect.
- Consideration was being given to training and support for parents.
- Digital learning required a longer-term strategy.
- Blended learning would require interactive classes with teachers.
- The networks had already been partially created for blended learning and it would be useful to show parents this at a city-wide level.
- There would be briefing session on E-sgoil/SCHOLAR practices.

#### Universal provision of devices

- Whether live teaching could take place, if there was not universal access to devices.
- Some classes would be disadvantaged if they could not partake in live teaching, If one child in a class did not have laptop.
- The measures that the Council was taking to ensure that there was eventually universal one-to-one access to devices.
- A return to blended learning would require interactive classes which would necessitate all pupils accessing laptops.
- It would be useful to show parents some of the blended learning plans at city level.
- The barriers that existed to live teaching.

- Any consultation should give exposure to as wide a group of parents as possible and there should be feedback to the elected members in this group.

#### Issues with different devices

- If the blended learning model was adopted, steps should be taken to prevent any possible spread of the Corona Virus.
- If pupils brought their own device, whether they could they access council Wi-Fi.
- There were potential difficulties and risks for teachers managing a class with different types of devices.
- Ideally, every child should have their own safe, secure, school provided device.

#### Purchase of devices

- It was not practical to allow parents to purchase a device and to use the school network.
- The Local Authority was trying to eradicate poverty and no child was expected to provide a core learning device.
- The Local Authority wanted to make funds available in their base budget to make devices universally available and was working towards this.
- A charity had reported that families with the greatest financial difficulties were also most likely to have purchased devices for their children during the Coronavirus lockdown period.
- There had been an increase in the number of vulnerable families.
- There should be a short term/medium term plan to allow digital learning without one-to-one devices.

#### Exams in 2021

- Whether measures were being taken to ensure that schools could properly assess pupils in S4 to S6, in the absence of exams.
- It would probably be confirmed between the summer holidays and October if the 2021 exams were proceeding.
- Pupils should have the opportunity to get the best grades possible.

#### Effect of the Covid Virus on the Council budget

- There were severe implications of the Covid Virus on the Council Budget with an estimated deficit of £50m.
- Solutions to this would include prudent financial planning, savings and potential changes to the borrowing regime.
- Pleas were made that Elected members should protect the education budget as education was the corner stone of this city's economy

#### The return to school in August.

- Whether there was any scope for schools to have a "soft start" for certain pupils to allay anxiety on the part of some pupils and parents.
- It was expected that all children would return in August and it was necessary to plan for that.

- There would be focus on health and wellbeing as well as on literacy and numeracy.
- The transition arrangements for primary schools also applied to secondary schools, to ensure flexibility.
- Whether the Council could employ all the probationary staff who still did not have permanent posts.
- Getting the curriculum back in place would help with the wellbeing of pupils in S4 to S6 as the pace of learning been disrupted.

#### Implementation of the 1140 hours roll out nursery provision

- The Authority was well on the way to 1140 hours roll out nursery provision, but their plans had been compromised by the outbreak of Covid.
- The Authority would determine what opportunity there was to develop the 600 hours and extend this where possible, eventually to 1140 hours.

#### Building works in the school estate

- Building works in the school estate had been affected by the insolvency of Central Building Contractors (CBC) for nurseries, so the Authority was going back to the procurement for this.
- Regarding the capital programme, most projects had returned to site.
- With respect to the CBC issue, the Authority was currently in negotiation with contractors, but negotiations needed to be finalised.

#### **Closing Statement**

The Convener indicated that he hoped that this session had been useful. All the questions would be put on the Council Website and if anyone had any further questions, these should be submitted, and they would be answered and put on the website. He did not think that there would be any changes to the plan for the return to school in August. However, if this changed, then there was a well worked out contingency plan. It was agreed that there should be another meeting of this group at the end of July or early August to assess the situation for August. The date of the meeting would depend on discussions taking place with head teachers.

The Convener thanked everybody for attending the meeting. This had been a constructive meeting, the Authority was doing its best and would try to implement all requests.

#### **Decision**

- 1) To agree to circulate the cleaning recovery advice for schools and for early years and the catering recovery guidance.
- 2) Parental support and training for technology to be rolled out, in the event that there was a need to revert back to blended learning.
- 3) To agree to share and consult publicly the Council's contingency plan for blended learning, when fully scoped, via the Council's website.
- 4) E-sgoil / SCHOLAR presentation to be shared with locality groups.

- 5) Feedback from locality groups on E-sgoil and SCHOLAR to be considered at a subsequent meeting of the Consultative Committee with Parents.
- 6) To add a statement to the Frequently Asked Questions on the Council's website of the intention to poverty proof the school day and the incremental vision on digital learning being accessible for all.
- 7) For a list of the questions and answers raised during the meeting to be published on the Council's website, and to invite parents with unanswered questions to submit these to the Council.
- 8) Appendix to the report which would be considered at the Council's Policy and Sustainability Committee on 25 June 2020 to be placed on the Council's website, so that the contingency plan, if required to be enacted, was available for the public to view.

## 10. Date of Next Meeting

### **Decision**

To agree to convene the Consultative Committee with Parents the first week in August 2020.