

Note of meeting

Consultative Committee with Parents

6.00pm, Thursday 10 October 2020

Virtual Meeting - via Microsoft Teams

Present (As taken by Roll call at the start of the Teams Meeting)

Elected Members

Councillors Ian Perry (Convener), Alison Dickie (Vice-Convener), Councillor Steve Burgess and Councillor Louise Young.

Parent Representatives

Alex Ramage (Education Children & Families Committee Parent Representative)

Kevin Kealey

Naomi Barton

Josephine Beech-Brandt

Rebecca Clacy-Jones

Alison Nicolson

Kate Morris

Tina Woolverton

Eileen Prior

Gareth Oakley

Gail Guest

Heidi Popovic

Karen Galloway

Officers in Attendance

Alistair Gaw, Executive Director for Communities and Families

Andy Gray, Head of Schools and Lifelong Learning

Arran Findlay, Senior Education Officer

Anna Gray, Senior Education Officer

Bernadette Oxley, Head of Children's Services
Crawford McGhie, Senior Manager – Estates and Operational Support
Michelle McMillan, Operations Manager, Communities and Families
Jack Simpson, Senior Education Officer, Communities and Families
Natalie Le Couteur, Committee Services
Laura Millar, Service and Policy Adviser to the Convener and Vice-Convener of
Education, Children and Families

1. Note of Meeting

Decision

To approve the Note of Meeting of the Consultative Committee with Parents of 3 August 2020.

2. Director's Update

A huge expression of thanks was expressed from the Director to parents and parent groups. The return to school had gone well and this was largely due to the cooperation and input from parents, teachers and young people.

There was now a rapid increase in the rates of transmission of Coronavirus, and there were large numbers of staff insulating, and the Council was cautious about opening extra-curricular activities due to the impact that this may have on keeping schools safe and free from Coronavirus. Safety would be the priority concern of the City of Edinburgh Council.

There were budgetary challenges presented by the pandemic. The key imperatives for the Council was working with Elected Members for a sustainable financial future, working on poverty and health and wellbeing which was at the forefront of the council's considerations.

The Education, Children and Families would meet the following week to consider a variety of reports which included the summary report on the return to school, the new Children's Service Plan a very important report in tackling equality to ensure racism was being tackled.

Crawford McGhie then provided an update on the school estate development.

The Education Children and Families Committee which would meet the following week to consider the naming of schools and signalled progress with the Schools estate development. The replacement Castlebrae High School would be named Castlebrae and South East Broomhills Primary, following a local consultation was recommended to be named Frogston Primary School.

There was a six month delay roughly on most of the building projects for the Learning estate. These delays were attributed to the reduced capacity on sites and delays associated with the progress on the site prior to the pandemic and for contractor reasons. The hope was for projects to be concluded by August 2021, however this could change.

The nursery contractor had been reappointed, following the previously appointed contractor going into administration.

There would be a review of the Capital Programme of works which were not contractually committed. While the review was underway the Council was progressing with the design work to ensure there was still momentum.

The Government had launched the phase two programme for learning estate strategy. –for which the focus would be on the Way Four projects. The focus was for the Darroch Annexe, the Trinity annexe at Bangholm and phase one of the Wester Hailes Education Centre development. Reports would be forthcoming to the Council’s Finance and Resources Committee once the tender process was complete for approval to proceed.

Questions were invited on the Learning Estate, for which the following points were raised:

Question : Update on Darroch?

Answer: It was originally due to be delivered by August 2021. It was due to go out to tender. Work was underway with the school for contingency arrangements. The would-be detailed updates in due course, however Crawford would. The funding was already in the capital programme.

Question: Could a report be placed on the website?

Answer: to agree that a summary report for each school with building works underway or planned would be added to the Council’s website.

Question: Was there a confirmed name for the new school at Canaan Lane Primary School

Answer: There was a working title for Canaan Lane Primary school, and the local community would be involved prior to opening and naming.

Question: The impact on Currie High School?

Answer: Currie High School was in the Scottish Government’s programme as a phase one project. 2024 was the planned delivery date. Consultation and engagement with parents had been interrupted due to coronavirus.

Question: Gaelic Medium Education secondary

Answer: The Gaelic Medium Education (GME) secondary preferred option for a co-located secondary provision with Liberton High School. The phase two of the Learning and Investment programme. For the GME element there was a requirement for a Statutory consultation be undertaken, which would inform the future direction for GME. There would be an informal consultation with the Gaelic Community and the Liberton Community to ensure they support of the proposals. If this went well, then a statutory consultation would take place and there was a plan for how this would be undertaken as it would involve a city-wide consultation approach. Concerns were expressed about Liberton High School reaching capacity issues. Contingency plans to address rising rolls within schools involved new classrooms being delivered by the end of 2020. Rising rolls would need to be dealt with for a number of years in innovative ways in concert with schools.

Question: The new school at Liberton, were there delays?

Answer: The building of the new school at Liberton was less impacted by Coronavirus delays, as the project was still in the design phase. The factors facing Liberton were associated with securing funding from the Scottish Government to allow it to progress.

Question: Materials to provide shelter for outdoor Physical Education during winter. What provision would there be to make covered spaces outside available?

Answer: There would be a survey undertaken with each school to assess their needs, however there would be delays in terms of procuring and also this would not be for covered spaces for outdoor physical education. The Parent Council's were welcome to work in partnership with the Council however the Council would need to ensure that anything erected in the playgrounds met with building standards. Facilitating curricular Physical Education outdoors under a structure was not the preferred approach, the expectation was for government guidance to change to allow more flexibility for indoor physical education, however the situation was ever evolving. Outdoor canopies to facilitate access to outdoor space.

Question: Active Schools, if a child got muddy and provision of changing facilities.

Answer: The Council would be encouraging as much activity as possible. Each school would be managing in the best manner they could to prevent children getting wet and muddy and schools would need to take mitigating steps to ensure children did not become overly wet and muddy.

Question: Schools Sports clubs, concerns around the gap provided in private clubs and schools who had been operating all sports since, and the concern on the discrepancy between outdoor sports on offer in the state.

Answer: The guidance was that under 12-year olds were allowed to play in different settings and yet PE was not able to be delivered. The ambition was to open settings as safely as possible. The containment of the virus was the overarching priority. When children were mixing in bubbles, and a child had tested positive, this would give rise to more children needing to self-isolate. It was a tension between allowing for

The Fee-paying schools did not have to adhere to the guidance in the same manner as the council that the national government requirements. The Council was working in accordance with the national guidance; however, school sports would make a requirement When a school was opened this generated.

Question: School football teams if they maintained their classroom bubble, could they train?

Answer: This was under consideration and being risk assessed however school football teams could not play other schools, due to the need to keep them in bubble.

Question: Children are attending other activities in a private setting where the activities were being paid for and concerns around the attainment and wellness gap and concerns that the most vulnerable would fall further behind?

Answer: The Council was seeking to maximise outdoor activities from October.

Decision

1. A summary report on the website for each school would be made available for schools which had building works underway.
2. To note the discussion.

3. Citywide Special Schools Update

Reflections and issues of importance was provided by the Citywide special schools group.

- The process for positive tests and the decision making which took place around this.
- Successes emerging, particularly around how regulated the children were and areas of success for which the Council had hoped to build upon.
- How hard the staff had worked and how they deserved recognition
- The Health Protection Team's process and sharing of information and how this would impact a parent's decision for a return to school.
- Transitions to adulthood for school leavers.
- Gratitude for support with transport arrangements.

Questions were invited from participants.

Question: How do we ensure positive destinations for transition from special schools settings into adulthood, recognising the lack of availability of day care spaces?

Answer: There will be staffing allocated to work on this and a recruitment process would be underway following the October break.

Decision

To agree to take this discussion on transitions back into the special school's group.

4. Keeping Our Children Safe During the Session

The most important aspect was keeping children safe. There were robust arrangements in place and the mechanisms were discussed. The SORT (Schools Operation Risk Toolkit) was discussed which was a risk framework to ensure that Headteachers had both a toolkit and a mechanism for engagement. This was a forum for lessons learned and for dissemination of key information for Headteachers in response to management of Coronavirus.

In the event of a positive case being identified, there was a process and there was incident management training underway. If there was a positive case the headteacher would substantiate the positive case with Health Protection Lothian and then notify the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC). If there was a complexity around the positive case additional measures were available for management of the positive case.

The school would need to undertake a contact risk assessment of the person that had tested positive for coronavirus and then an alert would be issued by the school.

The school would look at who had been in proximity with the positive case. An assurance letter would be issued explaining the process which had taken place, alongside advisement of whether children should return.

Health Protection Lothian could make a recommendation for a full or partial closure, in joint discussion between CEC, The School and Health Protection Lothian, however this was the last possible option, and staff would be redeployed if it was safe to do so to avoid closure. The risk of the teachers being off due to their need to self-isolate or due to illness was considered the key risk.

Suggestions on the specificity of the public health generic letter which had been issued in instances where a school had a positive case was discussed. Attendees of the meeting queried whether it was possible to provide more detailed information regarding which cohort of the school that was impacted, to allow for parents to make an informed choice and assess the risk about presenting their child at school. Some families who had shielded were particularly cautious about the risk of infection from their child attending school. The limited information within the general public health letter was attributed to data protection reasons and advisement was made that release of further information would need to be discussed with Health Protection Scotland.

Decision

1. To agree to discuss the matter of how much information could be shared within the generic public health letter for positive cases of Coronavirus in a school.
2. To note that Health Protection Lothian, would be the relevant body to issue guidance on whether information could be shared, due to data protection reasons.

5. Preparation for Blended Learning Contingency

The Council had a plan for blended learning in place which were being retained as a contingency. There were still improvements to be made to these plans by the Council particularly around digital arrangements and investment. To keep learning taking place for those children being asked to self-isolate but were well enough to continue their learning and those arrangements were still in place to support pupils' learning. Government funding had allowed the Council to employ 70 members of staff to support catch up learning and Covid.

Comments and questions were submitted from attendees:

Questions: Schools teaching in a digital manner during lockdown however some schools have reverted to going back to paper-based learning. In the event of a lockdown and the blended learning having to be reimplemented there was a concern about regression of digital skills for teachers.

Answer: Very keen to ensure staff wellbeing. There is more digital learning taking place however it was not possible to insist upon this mechanism.

Question- Devices shortages within Balerno high School and when will shortages be resolved.

Answer: The Digital learning teams were aware and engagement with ICT colleagues had been made to expedite this matter.

A discussion then took place on the approach of the Digital Learning Board who had adopted the 1 device per child plan however the estimated cost of this was £8 Million.

A bring your own device solution was an interim arrangement which had been proposed however this was being risk assessed. The merits to consider an interim solution, rather than aspiring for a solution which was recognised was not affordable for the Council was discussed. During the summer term parents were involved in the children's learning. The absence of homework means they were less involved in their learning and to recognise the lack of involvement parents now had in their child's learning.

To note that the reason for schools not encouraging formal homework was to allow parents to be creative at home. To agree to consider these learnings and take account of these so that a partnership between schools can recommence and to agree to share this with Headteachers.

Decision

To agree to have digital strategy as an agenda item at a subsequent meeting of the CCWP.

6 Budget and The Scottish Government Funding

Edinburgh had commercial dependencies on Tram, Edinburgh Leisure and the Council's Arm's Length External Organisation (ALEOs), this meant that the liabilities to the Council were heightened. COVID has cost the CEC £90 million pounds, of which the government had provided £30 Million of costs but it still left a £60 Million deficit. As a result, the Council's cash reserves were under pressure.

There would be difficult decisions that would be required, the government had given greater flexibility to Councils.

There had been good cooperation with COSLA and the Scottish Government however it was noted that the financial challenges were not insignificant.

Decision

To note the update.

7. South West and North West Locality Group

The process and efforts by Headteachers were commended, in relation to where there had been outbreaks of coronavirus in schools and the associated communication from schools.

Key themes emerging from this group were:

- Digital issues
- Outdoor Physical Education, while remaining within the boundaries of health and safety.

Decision

To note the update.

8. South East and North East Locality Group

Key themes emerging from this group were:

- Use of Microsoft Teams, by parent councils.
- The appeals system
- The SQA Plans

Decision

To consider how to equip Parent Councils with the use of Microsoft teams.

9. Update from Connect Representative

Eileen Prior provided an update from Connect, which included the following items:

- That there was a survey asking parents what was working well on the return to school. Parents were encouraged to share and respond to the survey.
- That how local authorities were engaging parents in decision making was being considered by Connect alongside a recognition of the disparity in communications with parent councils across local authority areas.
- That access to digital and blended learning were ongoing concerns.
- That the Scottish Government refreshed guidance would be available imminently and connect would be reviewing this with interest.
- That online information sessions were taking place in lieu of face to face sessions and there had been good and active support from parents within the digital space with an invitation for parents to attend.
- That the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) were reviewing the Curriculum for Excellence and undertaking an audit of the Scottish Education system which Connect was providing input to the research that was underway.
- That General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidance was available to parent councils, to allow them to comply with the requirements of the legislation, and to note the availability of resources from Connect.

Decision

To note the update from Connect.

10. Warm School Meals, Families Magazine Website and Fundraising

Parents asked whether there was there a plan to deliver warm meals for school lunches. There was an ambition to deliver warm meals after the October break and the delivery of this would be different in different schools.

The Families Magazine was issued to parents via email link, which parents could issue if they wished and a request was made to whether considerations could be given to the suitability and appropriateness of sharing the link to the Families magazine.

Fundraising was highlighted as an issue for schools. If there were ideas for creative ways to fundraise within the parameters of the coronavirus restrictions and were encouraged to share. To note Connect's information on fundraising and the availability of resources via the website.

Decision

1. To note the update in respect of warm school meals
2. To review the arrangements with the circulation of Families magazine link.
3. To note that Connect had support on fundraising for schools via their website.

11. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 10 December 2020 at 6:00pm