



Classification	Item No.
Open / Closed	

Meeting:	Overview & Scrutiny
Meeting date:	10 th December 2020
Title of report:	Children Young People & Culture – Impact of Covid
Report by:	Julien Kramer, Interim Director Education and Inclusion
Decision Type:	Council/Key Decision/Non Key Decision (<i>delete as appropriate</i>)
Ward(s) to which report relates	All.

Executive Summary:

This paper focusses on the main areas where we believe that the virus pandemic and response has adversely impacted on the lived day to day experiences of Bury children and young people; their educational outcomes and life chances. Despite the best efforts of parents, carers, teachers and all professionals and help providers, the pandemic has created daily uncertainty and confusion about the future for our young,

We are honest about the limits of our understanding of a dynamic and rapidly changing situation. We propose strategies to manage and mitigate impact and recognise that we need to keep a close watching brief on the effects of socio economic changes which we know can trigger stress reactions and feelings of helplessness and despair which impact the abilities of adults to respond to the needs of children and young people.

1. Well-being.

Covid and all its associated constraints and pressures is affecting pupil, staff and parental well-being.

- Real concerns about mental health of pupils and students, school-based assessments and wellbeing strategies.
- A focus on staff well-being; heads conference, weekly briefings, strong pastoral support.
- A Governor conference planned which is dedicated to supporting pupil and staff well-being - awareness raising, regular briefings, pastoral support to governors.

2. Educational Attainment.

Major loss of education and learning opportunities will significantly delay or inhibit the progress of our pupils and students.

- Loss of learning and attainment; Re-setting performance indicators, re-basing the service supports, re-drafting all the policy and documentation.
- Restricted opportunities for progression; Assessment with remedial and recovery strategies. Support from HMI, and from Teaching Schools Alliance.
- Multiplier effect of these on our most vulnerable pupils and students. Detailed and targeted support, regular data monitoring, provision of laptops, distance learning. School meal vouchers. College bursaries.
- Robust and continuing service re-set programme; Lean Service Review.
- The attendance of children in care to Bury is monitored and responded to by the Virtual School for LAC. Watching brief as to school application of pupil premium to mitigate impact.
- Work/training opportunities for care leavers - For young people aged 16/18 years – currently 70% EET. However, it is those 19 plus where a 50% EET rate is of concern. We know this cohort already struggle to compete with non-care experienced peers who will be chasing the same limited opportunities.
- 85 applications from parents to electively home educate their children (EHE) since September 2020 - 35 related to disruption to education. Some parents report having enjoyed home schooling their children during lockdown and wanting to continue. We now have 241 EHE children compared to 170 at the same time last year.
- A backlog of assessments due to increased demand is compounded by difficulties in undertaking prescribed home assessments. RAG rating to identify the most vulnerable children to ensure that any safeguarding concerns are prioritised.

3. Early Years

Closure of all settings. Key worker support for vulnerable children. Watching brief for impact on school readiness and levels of development measures (GLD). For some children the gap in access to early-years provision will not have been met through parent support and may have a significant impact on later outcomes

4. Early Help

Early Help Locality Teams were launched in October 2019 so did not have long to embed prior to lockdown in March. To date, 37 Bury schools are signed up to our 'Team Around' approach.

- Two centres have remained open for staff to operate from, with virtual 'Team Around' meetings to identify families needing support, as well as making links with local businesses who could offer support to families.
- Prior to lockdown, the locality teams would have supported a number of families with practical food parcels approximately twice a week. Since July (13 weeks) we provided 268 parcels supporting 672 children. Whilst some of this increase will be linked to anxiety and families caring for vulnerable children, this may also indicate increases in financial hardship and food poverty.
- Demand steadily decreased from when restrictions were slightly lifted but we will continue to monitor whether there is further increase following grater restrictions form the 5th November. We need to triangulate data through DWP to review increase in benefit applications etc.

5. Integrated Youth Service

The detached youth work offer has been intensified to engage young people who were meeting in larger groups during lockdown.

- Since August we have carried out 220 hours additional detached work.
- We have worked in partnership with Police and Early Break and sought to advise and raise awareness. This has placed pressure on the team in terms of the increase in work which whilst currently is off set by the reduction in face to face work.
- As we emerge form lockdown there is likely to remain a need for detached youth work, alongside some increase in direct work. We were just working through this balance when tier 3 was announced.

6. Safeguarding and Protection

We are concerned about the Social Isolation for Children in Bury's care and Care Leavers, in particular those young people who may be estranged from their family, living in semi-independence or in their own tenancies. We have put the following mitigation in place:

- increased contact to young people albeit virtually initially
- Risk assessments of young people continue to ensure those deemed most in need received a direct visit.
- Social Care CAMHS support continues; a' drop in' being provided on a virtual platform, one to one intervention to support emotional and mental health, virtual groups through WhatsApp and Zoom provide opportunities for discussions, support, debates and activities.
- Links to support available continues to be promoted by workers and through the Bury Directory, Care Leaver Offer and Fostering Facebook pages.

However, we know that there is a disproportionate impact in terms of mental health and life advancement on children and young people who have suffered trauma and adversity in childhood and adolescence.

Young people with limited funds/resources may struggle to purchase basic provisions. This was particularly evident at the beginning of the pandemic with

people panic buying and then those young people on a limited budget who would usually purchase value brands were unable to do so. The following mitigation was put in place:

- Food and hygiene parcels were distributed.
- Additional shopping vouchers were provided to care leavers due to limited provisions in the stores. Food poverty remains a concern that is monitored with increased contact and relationships with young people.
- Specific financial grants were made to help support families of disabled children

The New Kershaw Centre drop in for young people has not been available and this is a loss of provision, particularly for our care leavers who would use the centre to shower, undertake laundry, cook and use computers.

Court Delays were a concern in respect of progressing plans for permanence within families for children; sometimes delayed due to parents exercising their right to a face to face hearing in respect of their children. The Judiciary supported such a position, paying due diligence in respect of Human Rights.

- Out of the 18 children impacted by delay, 7 have a plan for adoption. Hearings have now been timetabled since the Court system re-opening at the end of summer 2020.
- There have been no delays in protecting children via emergency or urgent legal order.
- During the early lock down there were 70 virtual supervised parental contact arrangements undertaken by Bury's Supervised Contact Team per week. Contact has now moved to a hybrid approach with all children subject to care proceedings being offered at least one direct contact per week (subject to risk assessment) and also physical contact between babies and their mothers (also subject to risk assessment).
- All Child Protection visits continue to be face to face ensuring that our most vulnerable children are seen in person by their social workers.
- Multi-agency meetings such as Child Protection Core Groups have been held within timescale and facilitated by Microsoft Teams.

LAC sufficiency/foster carer availability; we used some of the freedom & flexibilities in terms of changing foster carer approval categories and allowing carers to be able to call upon their own support networks to look after children. These flexibilities ended in September and we are currently awaiting confirmation as to whether the government will permit the reintroduction of flexibilities.

7. Life Chances

We are clear that pupil and student life chances are impacted. Bury has established firm links with the Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN);

- GMYN have been helping care experienced young people aged 13-25 in Greater Manchester since 2012.

- Direct visits were re-established over the summer period (maintaining a social distance). The programme provides weekly activities that are designed to be fun but challenging experiences that build social skills, encourage health and positive wellbeing, develop self-esteem and provide skills for the future.
- GMYN began the employability programme in June; they had already begun to work with some of our young people in Bury in respect of employability with support delivered via weekly online sessions. Once furloughed staff returned to the programme they had more capacity to offer tailored one to one support.
- It remains a concern that the Care Leavers in particular who have limited life chances and EET opportunities may be further adversely affected by the pandemic.
- Normal work programmes are massively disrupted; we are resetting the school improvement agenda.
- Distance learning offers limited consolation; we are auditing what works.
- Traditional assessment and external examination is not appropriate; we are challenging DfE through Heads principals and via GM with member and officer support.

8. Emerging Vulnerabilities and Strategies

A range of issues and challenges have emerged as children and young people have returned to their setting/school in September. We are concerned in particular with the following:

- Cohorts of newly identified vulnerable children and young people, often seen in those who have social communication difficulties and/or social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH). These new vulnerabilities have been attributed to a range of factors during COVID, including social isolation, lack of structure and certainty, bereavement, morbid features of COVID, anxiety, loss of self-confidence and motivation.
- We have provided guidance and information to schools, Inclusion and EP Helpline as well as outreach inclusion services to schools and individual children. Working with local specialists and Salford Educational Psychology Service, we are implementing the national 'Wellbeing Return to Education' programme in Bury.

Existing vulnerable groups of children and young people, particularly those with social communication needs have faced additional difficulties with many developing new vulnerabilities as described above. The social work team specialising in supporting disabled children have identified that:

- Children whose parents are self-isolating are not receiving support from school, support providers, and social care, apart from virtually by agreement.
- Home from Home carers are not available at present.
- The voice of the child is not being captured as effectively due to less direct work.
- Fewer children are having support in the community from formal and informal networks of support.
- Staff who are self-isolating are unable to make home visits

- Parents and carers of disabled children are disproportionately impacted by loss of support when they are already disproportionately impacted by low income and family breakdown

All ongoing and emerging themes and concerns are discussed on a weekly basis and feed into the weekly vulnerable CYP group.

- Increased demand on the Inclusion Service by schools and parents. Since September, there has been an increase in the number of children who are being monitored by the Primary Inclusion Leads (38 cases recorded, the week prior to half term). These cases are predominately those where there is a risk of placement breakdown. This may lead to increased numbers of children being supported by Alternative Provision in the short term. We are providing targeted support and intervention for schools and children along with access to helplines and information, Wellbeing Return to Education support for schools.
- In respect of children and young people with EHCPs, we have seen a sharp decline in meeting 20 week statutory deadlines for statutory Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) (from 79.9% in January to a cumulative figure for this year of 34% by September). Some of this can be directly attributed to COVID and Bury has applied for exemptions to timescales where appropriate. Please note that the COVID temporary relaxation. The statutory timescales ended on 25th September 2020 and therefore no further exceptions can be applied.
- We have increased the number of Special Educational Needs (SEN) caseworkers from x 3 FTE to x 7 FTE and remodelled SEN activity. All schools and parents now have a named SEN Caseworker who has caseload responsibility. All EHC processes are in the process of being refined to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.
- The ending of the temporary COVID legislation relating to relaxation of provision in EHCPs from 31 July 31 means that the legislation reverted back and all provision in EHCPs is expected to be delivered. It is challenging for schools and the LA to ensure that for children with EHCPs, all provision in the EHCP is being delivered. There is a risk that not all provision will be delivered when children are at home. The vulnerable CYP group tracks and monitors this cohort of children and young people, but it is dependent on the data and intelligence available.
- Overall increased demand for SEN services from schools and parents. The service has received 24 requests for EHC needs assessments in September (historically, September is a very low month for requests as children are settling into school and schools are applying the graduated response). The inference to this increase is that children and young people are presenting with extreme vulnerabilities upon return to school, impacting on their ability to access learning and wellbeing.
- For some children and young people with multiple vulnerabilities, going back to school in September provided a much needed routine and structure that was missing. However, the impact of the prevalence of COVID and subsequent self-isolation process has been counterproductive as children are 'in and out' of school. This is creating increased anxiety amongst children with additional needs and causing instability of school placement.

- It is difficult to accurately track and monitor the attendance levels of vulnerable children and young people in settings and schools due to the dynamic nature of the spread of COVID, and the lack of a single data collection system. We have established a multi-agency group who are tracking children and young people and 'RAG' rating their support needs. This group meets weekly, building intelligence and data. However, because we do not have a single data collection system to gather this information, it is dependent on multiple sources (often leading to schools receiving multiple requests for information and data). Work is progressing to address this issue.
- Children and young people who require Aerosol Generated Procedures (AGP) (eg nebulisation), require specific arrangements to be made in school due to COVID. This has proved difficult, particularly where the physical constraints of the school building prevent the ability to carry out AGP safely. For some children with AGP, they have remained at home and the situation has impacted on their return to school. Schools are working hard to ensure that children who require AGP receive their education whilst at home, with outreach from school, online learning and resource packs being provided.
- Pressure on all services and systems impacts on the ability to work proactively (early intervention) and to deliver effective multi agency working (in some areas multi agency working has improved e.g. SEND/CwD). The vulnerable CYP group is supporting this work, but more is needed to support children and young people at the earliest stage.
- Wider impact of parental wellbeing due to reduction in family finances. Examples where parents need to return to work for economic reasons and are prevented from doing so due to children and young people not being in school and/or self-isolating. Weekly meetings are being held at the special schools (CWD and SEN Team) to identify the support needs of the child and family and where necessary, multi -agency meetings are being held.
- Parents remain concerned about the safety of children in school and some remain reluctant to send them – particularly those children and young people who were previously being shielded. There has been a very small increase in the number of parents whose children have EHCPs who are now electively home educating their children (3 in September). Parents reported that they have enjoyed their children being at home and that for some children, not being in school has reduced the pressure and relieved their stress and anxiety. However, it is anticipated that the number of parents requesting EHE may increase across the academic year and information from parents via the CWD team supports this. A monthly SEND & Inclusion parental newsletter is published, providing updated information on services offering support for children and young people during COVID.

9. Funding

Throughout the pandemic there has been great cause for concern in respect to the adverse financial impacts being faced by the Local Authority, educational establishments, children and young people, and families. There has been some support through various Government grants however the ongoing costs being faced continue to impact. The areas of continuing concern include:

- Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) and Childminders are being supported by the Local Authority in the protected deployment of the Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for free early education entitlements of 15 or 30 hours where eligible. These providers continue to be signposted to Government Covid Business Support grants, HMRC Furlough, and Discretionary grant support.
- Schools and Academies Exceptional Cost Reimbursement Scheme has not reimbursed all establishments to date for cost claimed prior to July 2020. The outstanding claims are currently subject to DfE scrutiny and validation.
- Schools and Academies are presently not able to claim for any ongoing costs, incurred as a result of their compliance to Covid-19 measures. This includes not being able to claim for staff cover and ongoing cleaning requirements.
- Schools, academies and Early years settings are not allowed to claim for any income losses, from cessation of lettings, before and after school clubs or charges to parents for early years hours attended above the funded free entitlements.
- Schools and Academies have been allocated a Covid-19 Catch-up Premium for the new academic year 2020/21 to help them contribute to the costs of additional teaching and learning, including tutoring, for pupils catching up on their lost curriculum attainment. The grant is being paid in three instalments over the academic year.
- Free School Meals funding for vulnerable pupils was not provided to cover the October half-term. The Government have subsequently announced as part of a national £400m package of support, that Free School Meals vouchers will be covered for holidays from Christmas 2020 to Christmas 2021, including Easter / Summer 2021.
- Any increased costs faced by Children's Service are being separately monitored and coded in the financial system. Monthly expenditure and income returns are being submitted to MHCLG as part of the overall Local Authority claim for grant support. Any grant received is being held at Local Authority level and not directly credited to each Department, thus impacting on monthly budget monitoring forecasting overspends.

10. Conclusions

Covid 19 represents a life-changing and life threatening challenge to pupils, students, staff, and parents. This challenge sits within the wider and seismic challenge to the life of Bury.

- The situation remains dynamic; and our response continues to be flexible
- The costs are, to life, well-being, attainment and life chances- our responses must continue to be robust and show resilience.
- The financial impact is significant- our thinking, planning and management of resources, spend patterns and our controls must all remain sharply focussed.
- In addition to our own pupils, there is impact on workforce further down-stream eg. social work student practice placements have been postponed, impacting on the supply chain qualified practitioners, long term effects on workers with COVID related vulnerabilities.
- New and adapted ways of working, what to keep, what to stop when and how to support constant change.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- We implement a single data collection system for tracking and monitoring attendance of all CYP including those with EHCPs and at SEN Support level.
- We strengthen early intervention support/pathways to schools – reducing demand on EHC needs assessments
- We recognise schools need to give time for children to settle and readjust.
- We work to further develop data in terms of single score card across the Childrens Landscape; this is specific to some of the work re EH and School Attendance which impacts our ability to monitor the impact and response and direct resources as effectively as possible.

Key considerations

Background

The proposal

Other alternative options considered

Community impact/links with Community Strategy

Equality Impact and considerations:

Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*

The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.

Equality Analysis	<i>Please provide a written explanation of the outcome(s) of</i>
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either conducting an initial or full EA.

This report concerns the entitlement to education. It recognises that prolonged absence from school poses challenges to young peoples' health, well-being and their educational entitlement.

There is an issue of equity on access- as the impact of the pandemic is random between schools; and it is differential between regions, North and South.

The potential impact on young peoples life chances is considered.

The position of vulnerable young people is felt to be particularly difficult. We identify a range of strategies to mitigate this risk.

**Please note: Approval of a cabinet report is paused when the 'Equality/Diversity implications' section is left blank and approval will only be considered when this section is completed.*

Assessment of Risk:

The following risks apply to the decision:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
To young people's health To their well-being. To their education . To their life chances.	. A range of health -led initiatives. A focus on well-being. Strategies to re-set the service and its supports. A forensic review of Skills development, access pathways and opportunities.

Consultation:

Legal Implications:

To be completed by the Council's Monitoring Officer

Financial Implications:

To be completed by the Council's Section 151 Officer

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Background papers:

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning