HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Education

Date: 2 July 2020

Report Title: The Phased Reopening of Schools and ELC Settings

Report By: Executive Chief Officer for Education and Learning

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides information on how the Highland Council has responded to the COVID-19 crisis. The report illustrates further the scenario-based plans that settings must prepare in order to respond to the Scottish Government's recent expectation that education provision should now prepare for full time reopening from August.

1.2 On 21 May, the Scottish Government set out plans for all schools to start reopening to pupils from the 11 August 2020. Following extensive national level consultation this has now been changed to the 12 August, with the previous day allowing for school and ELC settings to undertake in-service training activity. For ease of access the Strategic Framework for Reopening Schools, Early Learning and Childcare Provision is attached in the background papers section of this paper.

1.3 On 15 June 2020, the Deputy First Minister stated Scottish Government expectations around scrutiny of Local Authority delivery plans and expectations around maximising face to face Education and Learning.

1.4 On 23 June, the Deputy First Minister addressed the Scottish Parliament to provide an update on plans for the reopening of schools across Scotland in August. Referencing the improvement in the virus 'R factor' since the statement of 21 May, the Deputy First Minister announced that the Scottish Government's new planning assumption is that schools will return full-time in August, conditional and dependent upon ongoing scientific and health advice. The plans outlined on 21 May regarding blended learning remain as a contingency to be implemented should the scientific and health advice indicate that it would not be safe for schools to return full-time in August. The three key conditions for full reopening are a) that infection rates must be sufficiently low; b) that our public health infrastructure, including test and protect, must be in a position to provide rapid local action if necessary; and c) that the right protective measures and risk assessments must be in place in schools to ensure everyone is safe.

1.5   The models described in this paper remain vital as part of our planning for the new session. The Deputy First Minister reiterated the point that these plans would be scrutinised by Education Scotland. The Deputy First Minister's statement to Parliament can be found as a transcript in the background section of this paper. As a result of the timing of the 23 June announcement, there may be supplementary information that is issued following the distribution of Committee papers, and further update provided on the day of Committee.

1.6   Up until recently each Highland school had worked to create as much capacity as possible for children to be in the setting in August, with that capacity determined by the risk assessment and building capability of each school and setting, particularly whilst having regard to the current requirement to maintain required 2 metre social distancing measures in settings. This activity was undertaken in working to the previous 50% time in school criteria, which has recently been superseded by the Deputy First Minister's recent announcement pertaining to the new 100% time in school expectation for August.

1.7   Planning for such an eventuality will be based on making best use of available staff and careful planning to make sure that the spaces being used are safe. Council Services and Schools will now be working towards a new Plan A-C scenario-based criterion (below), with Plan C having recently been undertaken by all local schools as part of the working to 50% previous ambition. All Highland Council elected members were invited to a special briefing session on the 24 June with a focus on the reopening of schools and ELC settings following the Deputy First Minister's announcement.

- **Plan A** – 100% return with no social distancing measures – key focus for 12th August
- **Plan B** – 100% return with 1m social distancing using a range of local buildings and additional staffing – should 'r' factor increase; possible second wave
- **Plan C** – 2 social distancing with blended learning attaining 50% in school learning; using a range of local buildings and additional staffing; possible lockdown

1.8   **Plans A-C** will be prepared for every school and resources required identified. Outline additional resource implications for plan scenarios A-C are provided at **Appendix 1** for this paper. Early indications of associated costs are in the region of c£10-12m. This estimate will continue to be refined as officers complete the development of school, support and transport plans for all settings across the Highland Council area.

1.9   It should be noted that the guidance for Early Learning and Childcare settings is separate, however planning assumptions for 12 August is the provision of status quo, namely that ELC settings will operate as they were prior to the COVID-19 crisis period (i.e. plan A for ELC settings). A paper will be taken to the August Education committee to set out the Council's response to the change in legislation, that was invoked during COVID-19, in which the requirement for ELC expansion in session 2020/21 was removed.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:
   I. note the recent national and local level developments in relation to the reopening of schools and ELC provision, representing contingency planning for implementation in the event of the conditions for full reopening of schools not being met;
   II. note that the Council will continue to work with all schools to support the re-opening of schools and ELC settings in a way that is safe and protects staff and pupils;
   III. note the risks and implications relating to the reopening of schools and ELC settings as set out within this report; and
   IV. agree that the Chief Executive and the ECO for Education and Learning, if required, are to develop further planning options to support the safe and secure reopening of schools and ELC settings in August should national directives change during the period from 2 July to 6 August.

3. Implications

3.1 Overview
A number of Council services, including Education and Learning are currently working with local schools to assess and implement robust 'environment readiness' arrangements and school reopening plans. These measures include deploying effective physical distancing and no requirements (depending on the 'r rate' which will determine which plan option to be deployed), such as providing seating that is two metres apart, staggering arrival, departure and break times and one-way systems in settings.

3.2 Risk Assessments – Schools and ELC Settings based
3.2.1 Actions taken to support schools and ELC settings will be monitored on a weekly basis and more frequently as needed through meetings with headteacher representatives. Senior managers will overview communications, educational, social and emotional support, risk assessments, HR and other support provided to schools. We are seeking to ensure that robust risk assessment processes are in place to minimise the potential for risk to learners and staff, covering time spent within our schools and settings, and also on home to school transport. Individual school risk assessments have now been submitted and will be quality assured and monitored regularly.

3.2.2 These measures in addition to individual school operating plans for learner return in August will be essential to minimise the potential for risk in settings. In settings there will be increased hand-washing or use of hand sanitisers, enhanced cleaning, robust protocols for suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases. Schools will be undertaking individual risk assessments for vulnerable learners to inform additional support plans for children falling into this cohort.

3.3 Resource
3.3.1 The Leader of the Council has been in correspondence with the Deputy First Minister about the significant level of resource required and in response the Council has been asked to submit the detail as a matter of urgency. For the reopening of educational settings in August, the resource capacity of the Education system and key supporting partners will be significantly challenged. As part of the project management approach,

any cost additionality and funding gap is being identified, and will be subject to suitable governance. The schools reopening PMO sub group has undertaken an assessment of required additional resources to support the progression of each work stream. An overview of the currently identified additionally required resources is provided at **Appendix 1** of this report.

3.3.2   If the 2 metre restriction criteria for social distancing is relaxed (as is currently being) whilst this has the potential to increase the number of learners on each school site, this will at the same time have further significant implications due to adjustments being required to all plans and buildings, both physically and operationally for local settings.

3.3.3   Schools received written confirmation from the ECO for Education and Learning during the week of 22 June, of key budget arrangements for the 20/21 period. School budgets will be uploaded by the Council's Education Finance Service by the week ending 3 July. The confirmation email to head teachers, that was shared with Members is provided in the background paper section of this report for information.

3.4   **Legal**
As already referenced in this paper following the recent national determination pertaining to schools reopening in August, all local authority areas are required to work with local area schools, settings and facilities management staff to make the necessary arrangements for provision to formally reopen from the 12 August.

3.5   **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)**
The reopening of schools and ELC settings in August will impact on local infrastructure, whilst enabling the return to work of the parents of children and young people scheduled to return to learning. Key interdependencies such as transport are being evaluated by the work of the recently commissioned transport sub group, with outcomes reported to the work of the schools reopening Programme Board for governance and oversight purposes. The approach being taken, is to delegate planning and implementation to the local level, within an over-arching framework, recognising a one size fits all solution is not possible nor appropriate in a Highland context. This will mean there could be local level variations in service delivery.

3.6   **Climate Change / Carbon Clever**
The recommendations outlined within this report could have a neutral, or potentially positive impact. Specific arrangements for school and ELC return are still being developed, and the position in individual settings will only be known as those plans are finalised as this information would be key to informing further determinations.

3.7   **Risk - Overview**
As referred to within this paper, safety, assurance and a robust risk assessment process underpin all aspects of schools return. With the intent to ensure risk is thoroughly assessed and mitigated through actions taken. Planning is based on current national guidance and assumptions, including in particular social distancing requirements. The health of all young people and staff and families will be of fundamental importance as we return schools in relation to the impact of the COVID-19 virus.

3.8 **Gaelic**
School settings include GME provision, and therefore allow delivery of educational provision in those settings when capacity and circumstances permit with a phased and gradual approach.

3.9 **Workforce Implications**
The full workforce implications will be formally assessed and evaluated as part of project management framework led by the people sub group. Due to discussions and associated activity for this interface still being in the infancy, these implications continue to be fully determined. Following the outcomes of COSLA discussions held on Education on Friday 25 June, further clarity has been sought regarding the practical and financial implications of a full return to school in August along with the flexibility of the offer to fund post probationer teachers in the 2019/20 cohort. Trade union engagement is a key part of this part of the schools return project delivery.

3.10 **Communication/Engagement**
Stakeholder communications and engagement for this programme of work continues to be ongoing and will be crucial as such one of the key strands from the project programme of work, will include a stakeholder communication element to ensure effective consultation with; elected members, head teachers, trade unions, parents, carers, children and young people, partners and other relevant stakeholders. Communication and engagement will be critical to the success of this programme and will need to be deployed effectively using a range of approaches such as social media, press, internet, website, group meetings, radio and written communications.

4.   The Phased Reopening of Schools and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Settings – PMO approach and timelines

4.1   **Schools Reopening Programme Management Office (PMO)**
4.1.1   To ensure the effective co-ordinated delivery of this programme of work, the ECO - Education and Learning has commissioned a programme management office (PMO) approach with 11 sub-groups consisting of a range of local area partners, stakeholders and providers meeting weekly to develop operational plans, risks assessments and develop a shared approach to progressing matters. The work of the PMO Board is operationally managed by Lorna Bailey from the Council Corporate Transformation Service and meets weekly for governance and oversight purposes, with political challenge and support provided by the Chair of the Education Committee Cllr John Finlayson and fellow Committee member Cllr Graham MacKenzie.

Ref.	Sub Group Focus/ Theme	Lead
1.	Transport	Transport Lead
2.	Communications	Communications Lead
3.	ELC	Early Years Lead
4.	Catering	Catering Lead
5.	Facilities Management	FM Lead
6.	People	HR Lead
7.	IT/ICTiL	IT Lead
8.	North Area Project Group	Area Care and Learning Manager
9.	West Area Project Group	Area Care and Learning Manager
10.	Mid Area Project Group	Area Care and Learning Manager
11.	South Area Project Group	Area Care and Learning Manager

4.1.2 The Highland Council and local area head teachers fully recognise the importance of our schools and settings reopening, not only in terms of education but for social and emotional reasons, especially for the most vulnerable children. We also recognise that role of getting children back to school and learning environments in helping to kick-start the economy. Ultimately, the safety of school and learning communities is paramount.

4.1.3 The intention is to continue working closely with all staff at all levels and Trade Unions to enable our schools and settings, to be able to safely and effectively reopen from August 12. Risk assessment procedures linked to options A-C will inform all plans. The Council will continue to support all of our staff in working through what the new proposals could look like, but ultimately each school and setting is different and the decision on how they reopen safely will rest with them. School transport capacity considerations will be as important in some locations, as the available building capacity. The Council will be putting the safety of pupils, their families and school staff as our highest priority in developing a plan for children to return to schools and learning environments across the Highland Council region.

4.1.4 As reflected within the programme structure described above, there are a number of key dependencies and workstreams, to support schools' return. A number of these are cross-cutting in nature, with implications across many or all aspects of the schools return program e.g. people, communications, ICT. Workforce considerations are covered in some depth later in this report. There are also a number of these workstreams where they represent key dependencies on which local planning for school's return will rely, and close working across the different themes are required. Some particular aspects to highlight are summarised in the following sections.

4.1.5 Transport – a significant proportion of Highland's school children are transported to school on Council funded home to school transport. Firstly, working to plan A where no social distancing is required the Council in partnership with local providers awaits further guidance from the Scottish Government regarding any possible transport requirements for example whether face masks will be compulsory for school transport. Contingency planning continues for options B and C in which social distancing could apply to school transport resulting in capacity reduced to circle 20% (depending on vehicle type). Some of the particular challenges relating to school transport which are being considered include; vehicle capacity, hygiene and safety requirements, provider and driver capacity, implications for public bus routes, and implications for pupil concessionary places. The work of the group also considers wider 'travel to school' arrangements, including parental transport and drop off, cycling and walking to school, safer routes etc.

4.1.6 Catering - to date, the models of catering provision were focussed on scenario plan C i.e. taking account of social distancing arrangements and food safety requirements. However, with the recent announcements and a focus on plan A, it is envisaged that the status quo for food provision for our young people prior to COVID-19 will be in place. This may be affected by the continuation of shielding arrangements and possible implications of the availability of catering staff in key locations, this is currently being assessed.

4.1.7 Buildings and Facilities Management – physical building capacity under current social distancing requirements is arguably the most significant challenge and constraint in the planning for school return. Scenario plan A from above would have the least

impact if there is a directive to implement no social distancing measures. For contingency purposes in the event of needing to deploy option C, assessments previously took place on the numbers of young people that could be safely accommodated within our schools, and at a local level solution being developed in relation to the most appropriate models of education and learning delivery which would maximise the physical time in schools, within the capacity available. There are a number of other key considerations being taken forward which included the managing of safe access to schools during June for teaching staff and planning for works through to August to ensure our buildings are safe, setup and ready for schools return. Some of this activity includes building inspections, re-commissioning systems, any essential maintenance etc. On an ongoing basis, and determined by a risk assessment approach, the cleaning and hygiene protocols that need to be in place within the school from August onwards are being developed. It should be noted that the initial assessment of additional cleaning staff requirements is circa 30 FTE, i.e. approximately £650k.

4.1.8 COSLA and Schools Re-opening – the COSLA (Chief Officers Scottish Local Authorities) meeting on 26 June covered a number of key developments pertaining to the safe reopening of schools in August, with numerous key proposals and views proposed for the Scottish Government to consider:

    i.   for COSLA to note the decision taken by the Deputy First Minister to change the central planning assumption from a blended learning approach to returning to school to a full return for all pupils in August, but for a formal expression of disappointment that this decision was taken with no consultation with local authorities, trade unions or other stakeholders;

    ii.   for COSLA to agree that any return to face to face learning must be fully informed by scientific advice, to ensure that the safety of children, young people and staff is paramount and request that the scientific advice available to the Scottish Government on which this decision was based is made available to COSLA and local authority leaders;

    iii.   agree that local authorities should have flexibility on the August return for pupils;

    iv.   agree that COSLA officers work closely with Local Government partners including SOLACE and ADES to understand and address the practical and financial implications of a full return to school in August, including school transport, and how this can align with the need to have blended learning as a contingency plan;

    v.   agree that any new guidance produced as a result of the central planning assumption is approved through COSLA's governance structures;

    vi.   instruct COSLA officers to obtain legal advice in relation to the respective responsibilities for deciding on the safe opening of schools, or the future closure of schools in the event of an outbreak of COVID-19 in a school; and

    vii.   agree the current offer from the Scottish Government, for post probationer teachers in the 2019/20 cohort and that COSLA officers engage urgently with the Scottish Government on how the additional funding will be used flexibly.

4.2 **Outline / high level key milestones and timescales**

Ref.	Milestone	Timescale/ Period	Lead
1.	Key stakeholder communications	Ongoing from wc 25 May	ECO Education and Learning
2.	Key stakeholder consultations and planning activity	Ongoing from wc 1 June and throughout June	ECO Education and Learning, Head of Education and Area Learning and Care Managers
3.	School and settings building environment 'readiness' activity including facility and learner risk assessment and deep cleaning activity commences	Ongoing from 8 June and throughout June	Head teachers and lead professionals for schools and settings and Highland Council key services
4.	School and settings operating/ delivery model and approach for phased reopening

Planning activity to commence once informed by risk assessment and available data | Ongoing from 8 June and throughout June | Head teachers and lead professionals for schools and settings and Highland Council key services |
5.	Locality/ community 'assurance' engagement meetings and conversations	Ongoing from 8 June and throughout June	ECO Education and Learning, Head teachers, Area Learning and Care Managers, Head of Education
6.	Schools and Setting risk assessments signed off and test of assurance process (or local equivalent) approved for each setting	By July 2	All Head teachers and ECO Education
7.	Continued test of assurance/ continued risk assessment and community engagement	Ongoing from July	ECO Education and Learning, Head teachers, Area Learning and Care Managers, Head of Education
8.	Schools and settings reopen with adapted operating model	12 August	Head teachers
9.	Provision 'readiness' and health and safety monitoring	Ongoing from 12 August	Head teachers and Highland Council key personnel
10.	Assessments of provision capacity to 'scale up' number of learners on site and in classrooms	To be determined at local levels depending on evidence available	Head teachers and Highland Council key personnel

*These milestones and timescales are proposed/ draft only and have been shared in this report to inform latest thinking and planning. Planning will have a Highland region wide common approach to implementation of the Scottish Government expectations but allowing for a degree of local area flexibility in response to locality context and differing needs.

5.   Teacher Recruitment and Retention

5.1   Background and Context

5.1.1   The Education Workforce Planning Team undertook detailed planning for teacher staffing requirements early in 2020. Projected school rolls were collated for each individual school and staffing levels agreed within the Highland Council Teacher Staffing Formula, with Area Managers and Head Teachers supported by officers from the Corporate Resources and Finance Service. During the school closure period a further in-depth review of teacher staffing requirements was undertaken to assess the likely teacher staffing requirements owing to the range of school opening scenarios facing the Council during school year 2020/21 and the ongoing COVID-19 context.

5.1.2   School recruitment activity for the new session has progressed over recent weeks and a progress update paper will be presented to committee at the meeting on the 2 July.

5.2   Head Teacher Posts

Head Teacher posts are crucial to enable schools to be led thought this turbulent period. It is understood that traditional recruitment to these posts are likely to be very challenging therefore, wherever possible, Area Managers have agreed interim arrangements including delaying retirements where Head Teachers have indicated a willingness to do this and continuing with acting arrangements. However, there were a small number of posts that had been advertised in March and applications received, where it was felt that moving forward with recruitment would be the best option. A decision was therefore taken to progress with recruitment where possible through virtual means involving Elected Members and Parent Councils as per the current requirements. A Council position statement for promoted posts will be shared with head teachers before the end of the current academic year to provide clarity on next steps.

5.3   Primary Teacher Staffing

5.3.1   Across the primary sector in Highland, it is anticipated that there will be a reduction in school rolls based on projections of around 275, the impact of this will vary across individual schools, however overall it means that the requirement to recruit primary teachers in some areas will be reduced.

5.3.2   Workforce planning, in terms of the numbers of teacher training places made available through institutions nationally is determined by the Scottish Government. Over the last two years the number of probationer primary teachers entering the Teacher Induction Scheme and subsequently looking for employment in Highland has outstripped demand for recruitment, this will be the case again this year. A decision was therefore made that the approach to meeting our primary teacher staffing requirements should be to staff schools to formula within existing resources which include allocation of probationers, compulsory transfers and deployment of those teachers who are entitled to a contract based on their service.

5.3.3   Any recruitment needs identified as the planning for the return to schools continues will be made internally principally from the 19/20 cohort of probationers who will be moved to the supply list – any contracts offered will likely be fixed term of next session to allow for maximum flexibility.

5.3.4   In terms of the requests to appoint to Principal Teachers or Depute Head Teacher posts, consideration would be given to these on an individual basis.

5.4   **Gaelic Medium Primary Staffing**
There are challenges regarding recruitment to Gaelic Medium posts nationally and it is important that these are considered in terms of the Highland Council's on-going commitment to Gaelic Medium Primary Education, all posts have been advertised both internally and externally.

5.5   **Secondary Teacher Staffing**
5.5.1   As part of the work normally undertaking in terms of teacher staff planning, Workforce Planning and Staffing Manager had individual meetings with each of the 29 Secondary Head Teachers with Finance Officers and Area Managers before lockdown to agree staffing levels and probationer requirements, the decisions taken at these meetings have subsequently been reviewed.

5.5.2   Highland Council regularly faces challenges in recruiting secondary teachers especially to some of the more remote areas such as the far north and west. There are national shortages of secondary teachers across particularly Science, Maths, Technology and Home Economics.

5.5.3   Highland Council has been allocated 44 secondary probationer teachers for session 20/21 this is at least 10 less than what is required before withdrawals are received which have been around 25% over the last two years. There are shortages in Maths, English and French although at the time of writing there is a small amount of additional capacity across social subjects and biology.

5.5.4   In terms of the requests to appoint to Principal Teacher and Depute Head Teacher posts, consideration will be given to these on an individual basis.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning

Date: 22 June 2020

Author: Paul Senior, Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning

Background Papers:

1. **Strategic Framework for Schools Reopening**

2. **Schools Reopening PMO overview**

3. **Common Schools and settings reopening action plan template**

4. **Highland Council Schools Reopening Overview Plan**

5. Deputy First Minister's Statement of 23 June

6. ECO Schools funding and recruitment email communication to all head teachers and local members wc 23 June

Appendix 1: Additional Resource Implications Overview for implementation of scenario plans A-C

All Schools Reopening PMO sub groups have recently undertaken an assessment of the additional resource implications (over core budget allocation) that would be required to implement required activity for their schools reopening commitments. Option/ Plan C below was until 23 June, the scenario plan options that all local schools and partners had been working to, with the identified additional resource implications set out below. Since the Deputy First Minister's announcement on the 23 June, all PMO sub groups have been re-evaluating the additional resource requirements to successfully be able to implement scenario plan options A and B below.

At the time of the writing of this report, the Author was still waiting confirming from several of the sub groups on their final assessment, which will need to be informed by the required supporting guidance from the Scottish Government.

Project sub-groups;	Plan A – 100% return with no social distancing measures – key focus for 12th August	Plan B – 100% return with 1M social distancing using a range of local buildings and additional staffing – should 'r' factor increase; possible second wave	Plan C – 2M social distancing with blended learning attaining 50% in school learning; using a range of local buildings and additional staffing; possible lockdown
	Total Estimated Cost 20/21 £'000	Total Estimated Cost 20/21 £'000	Total Estimated Cost 20/21 £'000
Communications	-	-	-
ELC	-	-	-
Catering	49	169	198
School Transport	*4,743	*4,743	4,039
Property & Facilities Management	*4,275	*4,275	4,575
ICT/ICTiL	290	290	290
People - Backfill for Shielding staff	487	487	487
People - DFM Probationer Commitment (FY20/21)	944	944	944
Schools PPE (All areas)	838	838	426
Grand Total	Final £ TBC	Final £ TBC	10,958

* Baseline figure subject to change once full assessment undertaken on receipt of Scottish Government guidance for plan A and B