

EE32. Children's Services – School and Early Years Establishments Re-opening Plans (COVID-19 Recovery)

A report had been submitted to the Emergency Executive on 25 June 2020 (ref EE 25) on proposals for the re-opening of schools and Early Years establishments.

All education establishments had closed from Monday 23 March 2020. The Scottish Government's route map through and out of the crisis had anticipated that schools would be re-opened in Phase 3. The re-opening date for schools had been announced as 11 August 2020, although the date for Early Learning Childcare (ELC) establishments had not been confirmed.

The Service had been working with Headteachers to consider the options to re-open schools on a phased basis.

In an update to Parliament on 23 June the Deputy First Minister had stated that the Scottish Government sought to prepare for children to be able to return to school full time in August.

In light of this announcement, which had been made after the publication of the report to the Emergency Executive which had contained proposals for a phased return to education the Emergency Executive agreed to continue the matter to a future date in order that it could be provided with revised proposals which reflected the guidance from the Scottish Government on a full time return on 11 August 2020.

The committee considered a further report by the Director of Children's Services which provided further information, in light of that announcement, on:-

- Children's Services proposals and plans for the re-opening schools and early years establishments across the Falkirk Council area, and
- some details and context around the current challenges, limiting factors and costs that exist in progressing with certain workstreams associated with those plans.

A soft start approach was proposed for the first two weeks of the academic year and that proposals for return to schools and early years which had been submitted to the Emergency Executive on 25 June would form the Council's contingency plan in the event that the national guidelines or directions in force at the time did not allow for a full time return.

Decision

The Emergency Executive:-

- (1) agreed the proposal for a soft start for the first two weeks of the return to school and that children and young people would return to school full time on 25 August 2020;**
- (2) agreed that if due to the national guidelines or directions in force at the time it was not possible to return to full time school attendance on 26 August 2020, the contingency arrangement would be the plan set out in the earlier report (to the Emergency Executive on 25 June 2020);**
- (3) noted the changes already agreed to the term dates for 2020/21 as outlined in section 4.7 of the report;**
- (4) agreed the plan for the phased return in early years centres to allow provision of 1140hrs from 25 August 2020 in all early centres where this was physically achievable with 736.25hrs provided at the remainder;**
- (5) agreed that if due to national guidelines or directions in force at the time it was not possible to return to this provision that the contingency arrangement would be the plan set out in the earlier report (to the Emergency Executive on 25 June 2020);**
- (6) agreed to progress recruitment of early years staff as outlined in section 4.8 of the report and to the expansion of capacity at the early learning centre at Deanburn Primary School;**
- (7) noted the additional costs for other areas of service delivery as outlined in section 4.9 of the report; and**
- (8) requested that the Director of Children's Services keep the Emergency Executive updated on Children's Services progress on the re-opening plans.**