

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education Operational Delivery Committee
DATE	17 September 2020
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Accessibility Plan
REPORT NUMBER	OPE/20/129
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Eleanor Sheppard
REPORT AUTHOR	Mhairi Shewan
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.5

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To seek approval for the Aberdeen City Accessibility Plan.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 approves the Aberdeen City Accessibility Plan (Appendix 1); and
2.2 instructs the Chief Education Officer to review the impact of the Plan in 2023 in accordance with legislation.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. Purpose of the Plan

3.1.1 The Accessibility Plan ensures that long-term strategic planning and implementation processes of Aberdeen City Council meet the requirements of sections 1 to 3 of the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002.

3.1.2 In keeping with legislation, this Plan will ensure we are:

- enabling and supporting disabled pupils to access the curriculum
- improving the accessibility of our school buildings
- improving communication with pupils and parents and carers in a variety of appropriate formats.

3.2 Developing the Plan

3.2.1 A range of data sets were reviewed to help gather initial baseline data to support the development of this Plan. These included Population Needs Data already available, rich information gleaned from recent Quality Improvement Visits, surveys conducted over the last school session and information held on the range of needs and disabilities (pre-pandemic) evident in our children and young people.

3.2.2 Qualitative data has been sought to complement this process. This was mainly gathered through digital consultation with parents, learners, children's services staff, voluntary organisations and a range of Council functions. Further information was also gathered from the national additional support for learning review. Helpfully, a range of cross cutting themes emerged which have provided a clear direction.

3.2.3 In keeping with legislation, views were sought on the following three questions:

- Is the curriculum accessible for all?
- Can everyone access the physical environment?
- Does everyone have access to information in a timely manner which takes account of diversity and meets their communication needs?

3.3 Is the curriculum accessible for all?

3.3.1 Data from learners, parents and quality improvement visits identifies that the curriculum is accessible for most, but further efforts are required to ensure that it is accessible to a minority of our learners. In almost all cases the children and young people most at risk of not having an accessible curriculum have an individual plan (Individual Education Plan or Child's Plan)

3.3.2 The use of accessible technology such as Texthelp and Google tools is recognised as a strength. These enable learners to individualise their support and access the curriculum as independently as possible.

3.3.3 Effective curriculum design places the needs of learners at the centre of development with high aspirations and flexible learning pathways. Although there is some evidence of flexibility not being in place in a few cases, attainment measures for children with additional support needs in Aberdeen City are higher than both the virtual comparator and national average.

3.3.4 Aberdeen City's four-year average positive destination figure is 90.68% and 84.88% for young people with additional support needs. The figure sits below the virtual comparator (88.54%) and national average (89.17%) and highlights a need to review post school transitions.

3.3.5 The views of parents/carers were sought initially in the context of The National Parent Forum for Scotland's (NPFS) consultation around the national review of Additional Support for Learning. All parents who participated voiced the desire for mandatory professional learning regarding additional support needs. The need for high quality professional learning also came through surveys previously reported to this Committee through the Supporting Learners Programme and this is being progressed at pace.

3.3.6 Access to the curriculum is impacted when learners are not in school. The total number of primary school exclusions is at a three year low. Exclusion levels across secondary schools vary significantly and a reduction is being supported through our Quality Improvement approaches, our Supporting Learners programme and a review of our Exclusion Policy and guidance. There is a need to ensure that staff have a solid understanding of Education (Additional Support

for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004) and the Equality Act 2010 and this will be built into our professional learning calendar.

- 3.3.7 Parents made reference to a lack of personalised support or range of extracurricular activities of interest to all children. While it is not possible to provide activities to represent all interests, there is evidence that better promotion and communication could help children and young people access a wider range of extra-curricular activities.
- 3.3.8 The Independent Children's Rights Impact Assessment on the response to COVID-19 in Scotland indicates that many children and young people with additional support needs have been unable to access adequate additional support for learning or teaching either in school or remotely. Feedback from parents across Aberdeen City is mixed with many reporting very good support whilst others feeling that digital support was less impactful. The needs and supports available to children over the next few months will be carefully monitored through live data monitoring to inform the shaping of services around the needs of children with additional support needs.
- 3.3.9 Some groups of learners with additional support will be impacted in the medium to long-term by the pandemic. Our curriculum needs to respond flexibly to the changing needs of our learners in the current context. Given this, our 2020-2021 quality improvement visits will focus on how the needs of those impacted by COVID or in receipt of an individual plan are being met.

3.4 Can everyone access the physical environment?

- 3.4.1 34 schools (58%) are graded as A or B for suitability and some have specialist resources. The remaining 25 buildings are graded as "C – Poor". Many of these are the oldest buildings in the estate, including nine Victorian buildings, the design and construction make it challenging to improve their suitability, often because they cannot easily be made fully accessible for those with limited mobility. Accessibility will be a key driver in the upcoming review on the School Estate.
- 3.4.2 Parents requested that consideration be given to widening our understanding of disability access. This should include an audit of school buildings looking at access for all disabilities not just physical disabilities and consideration of how needs can be met. This must include assessing spaces from a sensory (autistic) perspective and for those with sensory impairments by or with input from specialist services including, for example NHS. This approach will help identify how best to support when operating in a building with limited flexibility.
- 3.4.3 Learners identified that signage in school could be improved by being at an appropriate height and labelled inclusively. This will be fed into the review of the School Estate.

3.5 Does everyone have access to information in a timely manner which takes account of diversity and meets their communication needs?

3.5.1 The recent local Child Friendly Cities Evaluation Report highlights key strengths including well-established participatory approaches and groups which enable children and young people to influence decision-making. It noted further work being required to ensure greater opportunities to influence a wider range of decisions that directly affect the lives of learners, personally and at a city-wide level. This ability to influence decision making will be taken forward through the Child Friendly Cities Action Plan.

3.5.2 Further consideration and efforts need to be undertaken to ensure that communications from all services including health, justice, social services are accessible, easy-to-understand and child friendly. The planned communication plan will help to co-ordinate messaging from across the council and wider partnership and enable more formal measurement of impact. This again will be progressed in partnership with Community Planning Partners as we progress our Child Friendly City Plan.

3.5.3 Work is underway to increase the accessibility of information to families and staff, particularly around process and services to meet learners' needs. It is hoped that we can build on the digital developments made over the last few months to further enhance our Digital Hubs.

3.6 Implementation and monitoring

3.6.1 Overall progress will be monitored and reviewed through the Supporting Learners programme which makes regular updates to the Committee.

3.6.2 In accordance with legislation, the Accessibility Plan should be reviewed formally within three years and a report presented to the committee on progress.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. Recommendations in the plan will make use of existing budgets.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Local Authority has many legal duties including those of:
- Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002
 - The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004
 - The Children (Scotland) Act 1995
 - The Equality Act 2010
 - The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

The approach being taken to develop the actions outlined in this Report will assist the Council to fulfil these duties more effectively, and secure necessary and appropriate education and additional support for our disabled children and young people and their parents and carers.

The Aberdeen City Accessibility Plan fulfils the Council's duty to prepare, implement and keep under review and accessibility strategy in accordance with the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	N/A		
Compliance	Non-compliance with legislation, financial claims and legal challenge (reference to ASN tribunal, Disability Discrimination)	M	Mitigated by services developing understanding to better meet the needs of our young people in Aberdeen City working in partnership with learners and families.
Operational	Staff are overwhelmed which leads to low morale as staff feel unable to meet the needs of disabled children and young people and those with additional support needs.	L	Mitigated by offering high quality professional learning for staff to ensure that they meet their statutory duties under The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 and Equality Act (2010)
Financial	Risk of not having sufficient resource	L	Mitigated by realigning services to better meet the needs of our young people in Aberdeen City.
Reputational	Risk of not achieving positive outcomes for disabled children and young people and their parents and carers Risk of not effectively meeting the needs of all learners and communication needs of their parents and carers	L L	Potential changes to our provision and development of the school estate will enable early transition planning and intervention thereby reducing potential risk. Development of a communications strategy to ensure shared planning and understanding.
Environment / Climate	N/A		

7. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	Children who have their learning and wellbeing needs well met are more able to contribute to a prosperous economy. This requires schools to be well led.
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	<p>The proposals in this report seek to ensure the best use of resource in the system, promoting an understanding of the circumstances of individual children and young people to ensure that appropriate and timely personalised support is available to them.</p> <p>Child Friendly City which supports all children to prosper and engage actively with their communities by 2026</p>
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	Underpinning the work of all schools in Aberdeen City is achieving excellence and equity for all.
UK and Scottish Legislative and Policy Programmes	<p>This report takes into account the local authority's legal obligations in respect of the legislation below:</p> <p><u>Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty to prepare, implement and review and accessibility strategy. <p>The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duties with regard to meeting the needs of children and young people with additional support needs. <p>The Equality Act 2010</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty to ensure we are not discriminating disabled learners <p>The Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty of education authority in providing school education • Raising standards • Requirement that education be provided in mainstream schools

	<p>The National Improvement Framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Authorities are under a duty to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of education of school education which is provided in the schools managed by them and to carry out the duty with a view to achieving the strategic priorities set out in the National Improvement Framework.
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8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	Required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

10. APPENDICES

Aberdeen City Council Accessibility Plan 2020-2023

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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