

Director of Education and
Partnerships
Presentation to OSB
3rd September 2020

Overview of key actions taken by Childrens Services in response to the challenges posed by COVID-19



At the beginning of the lock-down period, one of the Local Authority's key responsibilities was to ensure sufficiency of places for vulnerable children, those with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and key workers' children. A single point of contact telephone number for parents was established and manned within 24 hours and available via the website; this was manned over weekends and bank holidays. The aim of this was to ensure that in the event of a school fully closing or being at capacity parents could receive advice and guidance and a place could be found. Support was provided to schools to enable them to remain partially open including daily updates with DfE and Public Health guidance, bespoke support from the Achievement Team and help with resources such as PPE. A phased plan was devised in order to ensure capacity across the town should schools begin to fully close if Covid-19 cases were identified. This plan was created by the Strategic lead for Education who carried out extensive consultation with Trusts, Academies and schools. Supportive clusters were established so that children could attend a school near to them should their school close and key 'hub' schools identified in the event of significant school closures. Risk assessments, policies and procedures were also implemented and a team placed on standby should the plan need to be actioned.

Once social distancing and safety guidance was available, the Health and Safety team worked closely with maintained schools to undertake risk assessments; this template was also shared with all schools and Trusts as a supportive measure. All maintained schools received an on-site visit to assess risk and most academy and Trust risk assessments were reviewed by the Health and Safety team.

Other council teams worked continuously during lock-down to support schools to stay open safely in the early phases. For example, the School Catering Team liaised with schools in order to ensure that meals were available on site for children attending and for collection for children receiving free school meals (FSM); they also worked hard to ensure that the arrangements for eating meals were safe. Similarly, the cleaning team worked closely with Head teachers to ensure that increased cleaning measures were in place, deep cleans were available and that hand wash and other cleaning products were available. The School Transport team also worked tirelessly throughout this time to respond flexibly and safely to changing needs for transport for those children still attending school, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and in alternative provision (AP).

Overview of key actions taken by Childrens Services in response to the challenges posed by COVID-19



Despite the closure of the Newport Community Hub, the Ethnic Minority Achievement Team (EMAT) continued to provide support for International New Arrival (INA) and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children and families. All families have been contacted by telephone regularly and doors-step visits have been carried out to ensure safeguarding, and to provide support with form-filling in and translation. The team have supported families with paying for utilities, accessing food and clothing, and applying for FSM. All children who work with the EMAT team have received age-appropriate learning resource packs and magazines as well as support with home learning provided by schools. The team have also liaised with schools in order to provide activities and resources for children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) as well as supporting the transition into year 7.

The Achievement Team's Literacy Advisor and National Literacy Trust (NLT) Hub Manager worked tirelessly in conjunction with the School Readiness Team in order to engage children and young people, their families and the wider community and ensure they have reading materials. To date over 7,500 books and magazines have been gifted to our vulnerable families with an RRP in excess of £45k. Furthermore, fortnightly Roald Dahl reading challenges provided additional engagement and author Rachel Wong collaborated with the NLT in order to challenge children to help her write her Middlesbrough based book, 'Parmo to the Rescue'. A subsequent illustration competition saw over 150 entries, with 25 Middlesbrough children's work being selected for inclusion in the published book. Most recently, children and families took part in the Midsummer Challenge where they submitted photographs of themselves reading in various places and scenarios with daily winners. For Middlesbrough families these books, challenges and resources have been invaluable and have helped support the home learning environment throughout lockdown.

Statistical data highlighting impact of COVID-19 in educational settings within Middlesbrough



In March the Government asked schools to close to all children, with the exception of vulnerable children and those of key workers. The Government suspended the power of local authorities to take legal action to enforce attendance and told schools they should not follow their normal processes for recording attendance. The impact was that school attendance in Middlesbrough fell to exceptionally low levels.

Attendance of the permitted groups did increase over the period of 'lock down' but overall attendance remained at a low level. Whilst many schools have tried to support children's learning via work packs they can work on at home and through on line and video based resources, engagement is judged to be low. This means that schools face a considerable challenge in September and beyond in supporting children to reengage with learning.

The graphs below provide information on the attendance of children at school during the Covid period. This is compared with the average rates of attendance that we would expect to see in the spring and summer terms.

% of vulnerable pupils in attendance

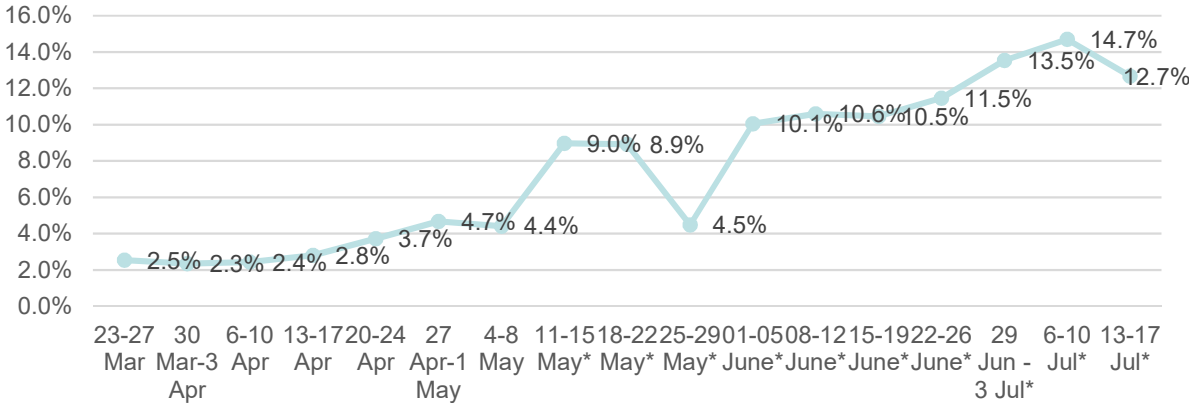


Figure 1 tracks the attendance of Middlesbrough's vulnerable children during the Covid period up to the summer holidays. Attendance peaks at 13 to 14%. Prior to Covid the attendance of this group of children was around 80%.

Statistical data highlighting impact of COVID-19 in educational settings within Middlesbrough

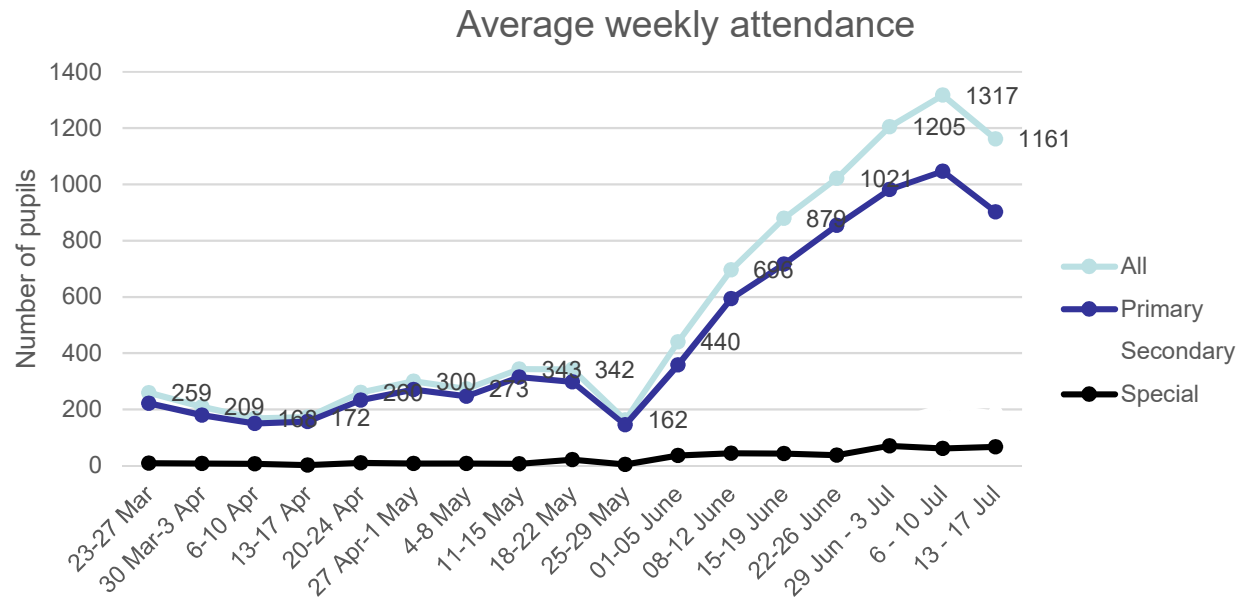


Figure 2 shows the school attendance for all of Middlesbrough’s children, and also the primary, secondary and special school children. From the end of May school attendance increased significantly, but even at the peak in mid July it was only around 7.5% of children, most of whom were primary aged. This compares to pre Covid attendance which was consistently around 92% for secondary aged children and 94% for primary aged children.

School Meal Provision



In the early phases of lock-down, school meal provision for FSM was primarily through packed lunches to be delivered or picked up on site, however there was a varied level of take up of these meals and schools, supported by Education teams, began to implement vouchers. Once the national voucher system was implemented, some schools chose to continue their own arrangements, however the majority chose to sign up to the Government's Edenred system. Unfortunately, there were significant issues with the system; the Achievement Team acted as a conduit for collating concerns and issues from schools and feeding back to the Department of Education (DfE). The provision of this information to the DfE allowed for the system to be developed and improved, and the liaison with specific schools undoubtedly resolved problems more quickly than they would have been through the Edenred system.

All of this continued through the Easter and May holidays to ensure that all children on FSM had access to meals and eventually the Edenred scheme was extended to the summer, however some schools continue to provide packed lunches. Additionally, the Achievement Team worked with schools, parents and Revenues and Benefits to ensure that parents whose circumstances had changed during lock-down were able to apply for and access FSM.

Holiday Hunger Scheme

Middlesbrough Environmental City (MEC) has led on the partnership with FareShare, the UK's national network of charitable food redistributors to deliver 120 pallets of free food during the school holidays. This has led to reducing costs of purchasing food to give to local families. PD Ports provided warehousing and logistic facilities at Teesport.

Additionally, in July 2020, the Applebridge Family Businesses approached Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation to provide £40,000 funding for 30,000 hot meals to be provided to local schoolchildren in South Tees. This collaborative effort saw Chefs from Middlesbrough Football Club volunteer to cook the meals daily at the Riverside Stadium which were then distributed by Applebridge and other partners including Middlesbrough Council via the Newport Hub.

Hence, this summer the national and local system has provided:

- Free school meal vouchers worth £15 per week per child to those eligible for free school meals to be spent in eligible supermarkets
- 51,000 meals to families across South Tees via the Feast of Fun
- 30,000 hot meals via the Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation and Applebridge Family Businesses collaboration
- Virtual Eco Shops have delivered 478 food parcels, equating to 3,824 meals

School re-opening arrangements



During lock-down, weekly meetings took place with a representative group of schools, Trusts and Academies to focus on recovery and planning for September, alongside weekly meetings with Trade Unions and all maintained schools. These regular meetings have allowed for information to be shared, consultation on planning of council teams such as transport, discussion of issues and collation of information for the DfE. Reviews of risk-assessments have been undertaken for all maintained schools and again, support has been offered to all schools. Conversations with the trade unions have allowed for issues such as staff wellbeing, the impact of shielding and quarantining, and risk assessment to be explored and have facilitated joint working. Schools have undertaken significant logistical planning using the government guidance for opening such as forming protective 'bubbles', systems for movement around school, reviewing lunch time arrangements and start and end times. The School Transport Team have liaised with schools to ensure that transport plans support this and to ensure there is sufficiency of transport in September. All schools requesting them are being provided with temperature guns and the Local Outbreak Plans have been shared so schools understand the arrangements for local lock-downs.

Special Schools have been working with Health and Transport Colleagues to support a smooth return to school in September.

Each setting is working towards an approach which will best support the return to school for children and young people. This includes staggered start and finish times and working in identified bubbles. Alongside this the Children with Disabilities Service is working with schools to ensure that identified Bubbles are maintained where possible outside the school day. This will mean an alternative delivery of services to meet the identified needs of children and young people who access support via the Children with Disabilities Team and commissioned services.

There are a very small number of children with complex Health needs who require specific specialist support. Plans have been put in place with Health colleagues and families regarding how this support will be delivered in school. For these very complex children they will access school on a part-time basis and receive the rest of their education at home.

Transport colleagues have secured additional transport to deal with demand and are currently ensuring all required training is in place for all existing and new staff. This includes safeguarding, the use of PPE and required risk assessments.

School re-opening arrangements – Health Protection Board

South Tees Health Protection Board did a planning session in June to help make arrangements to support schools implement required actions for prevention and to be able to effectively respond in the likelihood of an covid-19 outbreak. In addition, the Director of Public Health (DPH) attended a heads of schools strategic partnership to ascertain any additional needs and understand how public health could work with schools to make them covid-19 secure.

Subsequent measures being put in place to prepare schools to open safely:

Risk assessment – Risk assessments took place in June and will be repeated by the health and safety team again before schools re-open. The council's education leads will work closely with schools to support them comply with guidance. In addition, the Public Health team have shared a YouTube video on infection control in schools with all schools.

Communication strategy – A communications strategy is being developed for schools. The strategy provides key messages that schools will have to share with parents in order to ensure that consistent messages are being given out as part of measures for prevention. The strategy also explains what schools should expect in the event of an outbreak and how we will engage with and work with them to control any localised outbreaks in a school. The North East Health Protection Team (HPT) has also developed a covid-19 Q&A document that has been shared with all schools.

Reporting and responding to suspected or potential outbreaks in a school – The North East Health Protection Team (HPT) have developed a schools management protocol for schools. In addition the South Tees Health Protection Board has developed a flowchart for schools that outlines the steps that will be taken by the local authority in the event of an outbreak and the support that is available to schools.

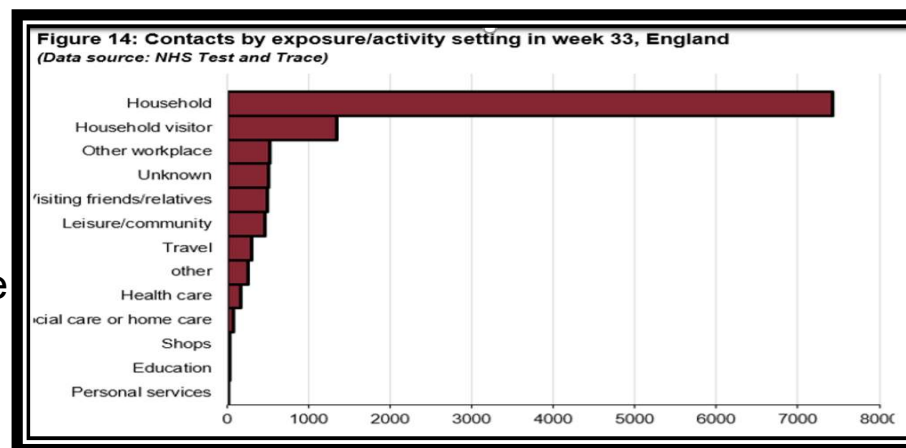
Data and intelligence – Public Health South Tees is developing a data and intelligence report process that will give schools confidence about prevalence and patterns of covid-19 in the local community. This will help schools understand the level of risk of infection in the community affecting the school setting.

School re-opening arrangements – Data monitoring and surveillance

National Covid-19 Surveillance

- The scientific advisory group for emergencies (SAGE) advises that the incidence of Covid-19 in the community should be considered when making decisions for school opening or closures. Public Health England has produced a surveillance system that helps to monitor the incidence of Covid-19 in local authority areas and flag where additional measures are required. This provides an opportunity for central government, working in collaboration with local authority to act quickly and put in place relevant measures to contain any local outbreaks. Middlesbrough currently has much lower incidence of covid-19 and is therefore not one of the watch list areas.
- Data to date also shows that infection among school aged population has remained very low across the time frame of the pandemic.

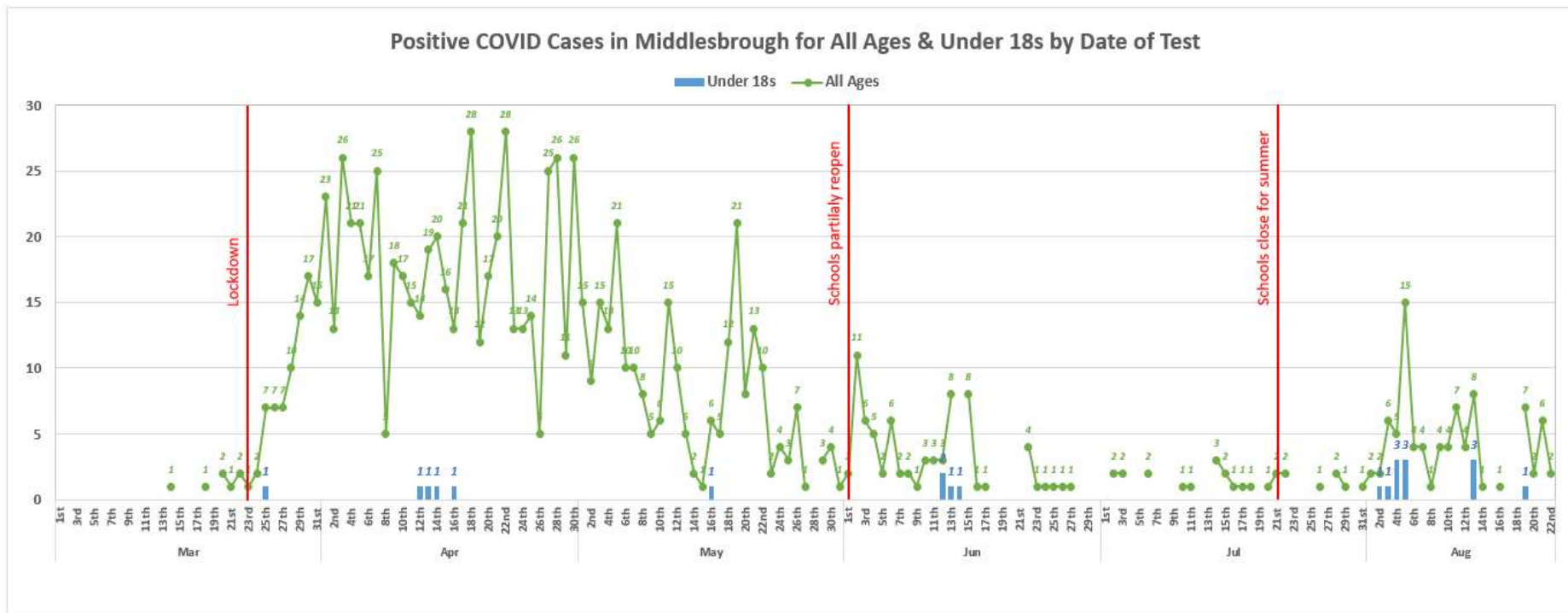
The test and trace programme also collect information on all contacts of covid-19 positive cases. This information has been collated since the implementation of the programme and provides an overall picture of where people are being exposed to and becoming infected from late May 2020 onwards. Majority of patients have become infected through exposure from other household members or a visitor to a household. Education setting is one of the least areas of exposure for infection.



School re-opening arrangements – Data monitoring and surveillance

Middlesbrough COVID-19 Cases – Under 18s

- In England children under 16 made up just 1% of cases in the first peak of the virus, even though they account for 19% of the population.
- Out of a total of 1,058 COVID cases in Middlesbrough tested between 14th March and 22nd August 2020, 22 (2.1%) of these were for individuals aged between 0-17 years. Of these 22, 13 were school aged 5-16 years old.
- Of the total, 12 were part of the recent outbreak in Middlesbrough and tested between 2nd and 19th August. Of the 4 cases during the period that schools were partially open, only 3 were school aged children and 2 of these were from the same household.



Further Information to note:



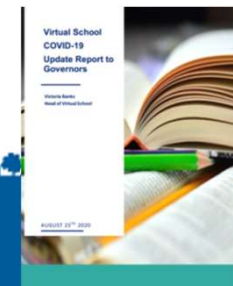
Supporting Schools to Ensure Good Attendance in September 2020

Schools locally and nationally are expecting attendance to be low in September, even though the DfE's expectation is that all children should be attending. Schools have a range of strategies and mechanisms which they use to encourage children to attend, and they are provided with funding in order to commission their own education welfare services to work with children and families.

However following the Covid pandemic the Council wants to do all it can to help schools, families and children get back to learning. We will be offering schools and families a range of support, and we plan to work in harmony with school leaders to ensure our work has maximum impact. We intend to:

1. Ensure there is a town wide clear and consistent message given to parents. We know that some families are unaware of the expectation that children are to return to school in September, so we will be writing to the parents of every child setting out clearly what we expect. Headteachers agree that getting the communication right over the summer break is crucial.
2. We have asked schools to identify children who they think are more likely to find returning in September challenging. We will be contacting these families to ensure that whatever barriers may be in place making attendance difficult are removed.
3. Where we identify families that require significant support, we will be using our own Education Welfare Officers to provide direct intervention.
4. We will be encouraging walking and cycling to school, to help deal with concerns around public transport.
5. We are developing a multi-agency approach to better provide joined up support to families and children who need it.
6. Our Educational Psychologists will be providing direct work in schools to help support children who are finding the move back to school difficult. This support will be linked to an enhanced offer of mental health support in schools being offered by the Headstart programme.
7. We will not be using legal measures to enforce attendance for the first half term to give children and families the opportunity to take advantage of the other support on offer (though please note there are some historical prosecution cases that will be progressed).

Virtual School Report re COVID



Further Information to note:

- Pre-Covid schools had carried out a huge amount of work around curriculum development in light of the new Ofsted framework. As they transition towards a 'new normal' post-Covid, this curriculum work needs to be revisited, viewed through a different lens and set on a different course. The intent of each schools' curriculum may have shifted, with leaders and teachers re-evaluating what good outcomes for children and young people will look like in the coming months and years. There are questions around national assessment and how this will be impacted as well as an acknowledgment that children's learning has been significantly disrupted, some of them at pivotal times for transition to their next phase. In order to support school leaders with these challenges, a bid for funding has been submitted to the Tees Valley Combined Authority which will allow schools across the Tees Valley to collaborate and develop and share next practice.
- During COVID the DfE issued guidance to local authorities which required all children and young people with an EHCP to have in place a Risk Assessment of their needs based on the current EHCP of the child and where required alternative models of delivery to meet the identified provision within the plan. It must be noted that the vast majority of children and or young people with an ECHP where able to safely remain at home during this time. As part of the Risk Assessment process weekly calls were made to schools and settings and in some cases to families to check that the child or young person was having their needs met and any identified issues were actioned. Alongside this weekly meetings between , Education, Health and Social Care took place to support any child with complex health needs.
- The DfE also issued guidance to support the completion of any new requests for an EHCP and to ensure that this 20 week assessment process was not delayed as a result of COVID. As a result of implementing new ways of working the completion of EHCPs within Middlesbrough is still over 90% compared to approx. 60% nationally.

Further Information to note:

Campaign to reduce NEET post-September

Young people aged 16-18, in particular this years school leavers, have had their education and opportunities impacted upon by COVID-19. To address this, a marketing campaign and targeted support work has been undertaken to encourage and support these young people to participate in education, employment and training.

This work has included:

- Local Authority facilitated virtual transition days for schools and colleges
- Local Authority teams work together to identify young people who are at a higher risk of becoming NEET, and providing targeted information, advice and guidance to these young people and their families about their options.
- The development of the 'Your Future Matters' marketing campaign across the town, including social media and local marketing and publicity (see below)
- Ongoing collaboration with a wide range of education and training providers to co-ordinate the response and signpost young people effectively.
- Follow up virtual sessions are planned with Colleges and providers in early September to review progress, and completed further targeted work as required.

Supporting Remote and Distance Learning for young people (Community Learning)

All teaching and learning for study programmes and apprenticeship programmes were switched to remote delivery during COVID-19. Staff utilised a range of online learning platforms to deliver to learners, set work and assess work. Levels of learner engagement remained good throughout and learner achievement has remained on track. The teams have worked to ensure that remote learning packages have been holistic and included emails such as the provision of careers information, advice and guidance, along with pastoral and learning support for those learners with individual needs.



Further Information to note:

Key successes have included;

- Weekly welfare calls for at risk and vulnerable learners and their families
- Establishing a Learner IT Equipment Loan system to overcome digital barriers to learning
- Support for learners eligible for free meals
- Feedback from learners – a survey of apprentices in May showed that 92% of apprentices felt they had the right support for remote learning and 100% knew where to go to get additional help.
- Well organised remote support for assessments – 14 apprentices successfully completed their end point assessment during lockdown.

Supporting Adult Learners to continue learning (Community Learning) and find work

Throughout the COVID pandemic, adult learning has continued to be delivered online. The service quickly responded and converted to online learning using Google Education which allowed tutors to remotely deliver sessions and keep in contact with learners. Out Adult learning offer now included a range of distance learning options which are aimed at those sectors most impacted by COVID-19.

Key successes have included:

- Delivery of online employability courses following the increase in unemployment which has engaged over 549 adult learners.
- Remote 1:1's to support those who need to move into employment, this has led to 28 adults supported to move into employment during COVID via our Routes to Work and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).
- Increased distance learning offer aimed at supporting the wellbeing of our community, including mental health awareness and understanding anxiety and depression.
- Digital skills courses developed to support residents to remain in contact virtually with friends, family and colleagues. The included: how to use Zoom, Google Meets, Microsoft Teams etc.

