

EXECUTIVE MEMBER - THE MAYOR

A meeting of the Executive Member - The Mayor was held on Tuesday 2 February 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors A Preston (The Mayor) (Chair),

OFFICERS: S Blood, D Johnson, J McNally, A Perriman and S Butcher

20/8

EXTENSION OF IT PROVISION IN SCHOOLS FOR VIRTUAL LEARNING

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report to support an initiative to ensure Middlesbrough's children and young people have access to IT hardware and internet connection to enable remote virtual learning.

The report provided context and rationale for an investment in remote technology aimed at narrowing the digital divide and provide children and young people an equitable opportunity to learn in the current circumstances.

The report required a decision as there was a requirement for a Single Member decision to formally consider this report to agree to provide £350K funding to mitigate the impact of extended school closures as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic. The funding will support recovery from 'lost learning' for young people and the ability to participate in online learning.

The report outlined that In December 2020, the Council committed £20,000 to support disadvantaged pupils to access IT hardware and internet connection to enable virtual learning and to mitigate disruption from learning due to the impact of Covid. 50 devices and Wi-Fi connectivity were purchased through ONEIT and a loan scheme established for schools to access. Under the original plans (when Middlesbrough was Tier 3), schools were invited to loan devices should a learning bubble need to isolate away from school. Due to the most recent Proposed decision(s) To support an initiative to ensure Middlesbrough's children and young people have access to IT hardware and internet connection to enable remote virtual learning restrictions which included the closure of schools this scheme has now been exhausted and all digital devices are now loaned out (on long-term loan).

Under current lockdown measures schools have increased accountability to provide learning that mitigates lost learning as a result of COVID. New government guidance was published that strengthened expectations for the provision of remote education and confirmed remote education curriculum should be aligned to the classroom curriculum as much as possible. Ofsted have also confirmed schools remote learning offer will be a key focus of interim visits. This has significantly increased the onus on adequate provision of digital devices/ digital access for the young people in the town.

In order to fulfil this expectation, nationally DfE have increased their offer to schools by another 300,000 laptops in addition to the 700,000 already delivered and they have confirmed all schools will receive 100% of their ordered allocation. Analysis of school pupil premium numbers has revealed that this allocation only caters for a specific cohort of pupils within schools total of disadvantaged pupils meaning that some pupils will not receive a device from the DfE. Recently published data confirms that 1408 devices have now been delivered to maintained schools and approximately 7000 to Academy Trusts. Figure 1 of the report outlined the breakdown of disadvantaged pupils in schools across Middlesbrough.

The report further gave information in relation to the demand and also explained the proposal as detailed below:

Schools have been invited to submit requests for support for additional IT technology including WIFI and digital devices. This has enabled schools to create a preferred choice based on pupil need and request systems that will fit within their local IT environment.

Total number of devices requested: 1,291

Total number of WIFI connectivity requested: 261
Total expenditure for this option: £345, 102
(Appendix A)

These figures were representative of school replies and account for pupils in all key stages.

It was proposed funding was offered to the schools as listed above which will purchase of the necessary remote learning equipment for their pupils.

Funding for this scheme would be sourced from the 'Contain Expenditure Management Fund' (COMF) under the categories of:

- Targeted interventions for specific sections of the local community and workplaces
- Community-based support for those disproportionately impacted - such as the BAME population

OPTIONS

Alternative options considered

Other options have been explored, including a tender process and sourcing laptops 'in – house'. It is clear these other options will incur an increased time delay in roll-out and there was a clear urgent need to provide devices as soon as possible to stop the young people of Middlesbrough being further disadvantaged by the prolonged lockdown/ school closure.

Other options considered also did not enable timely bespoke provision at a school level which was necessary when supporting pupils with the digital devices within the local IT school environment.

ORDERED

- 1. That Single Member decision supports the initiative to ensure Middlesbrough's children and young people have access to IT hardware and internet connection to enable remote virtual learning and agree funding to the sum of £350K to purchase 1,291 devices and 261 remote connectivity.**
- 2. That an agreement be made with schools that under these arrangements the ownership of the devices rests with schools. The devices will not be returned to the LA creating lasting legacy of digital provision across the town.**

REASON

The decisions were supported by the following reason:

The impact on learning for pupils not having access to remote virtual technology will widen the achievement gap. Dedicating this resource will help secure learning opportunities as well as promote safeguarding for pupils who do not have access appropriate technology in the home. In addition, this facilitation will promote the government message of wherever possible stay at home and support school closures to help effectively manage the impact of Covid.

20/9

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL SUPPORT FOR TEES VALLEY BID FOR FREEPORT STATUS

The Director of Legal and Governance submitted a report to be noted and to endorse the submission of a Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) led bid to the government by 5th February 2021 for a Freeport in the Tees Valley sub-region.

It is proposed that Middlesbrough Council's endorsement of the bid be signified by the Elected Mayor signing the bid on behalf of the Council.

The bid for Freeport status must be supported by the leader of each Local Authority- in this case the Elected Mayor of Middlesbrough - within whose area the proposed Freeport zone lies. An Executive decision is sought to endorse the bid and to enable

the Mayor to signify the Council's endorsement by signing the bid. Should the bid be successful, then further discussions will take place with TVCA and Government in order to finalise proposals for the Freeport, prior to a further report being brought back to full Executive for approval.

As set out by the Government, Freeports are a flagship programme that will play an important part in the UK's post-COVID economic recovery and contribute to realising the levelling up agenda by bringing jobs, investment and prosperity to some of the most deprived communities across the UK, with targeted and effective support. The government recognises that different regions will have different existing strengths, institutions and local economic strategies.

The Government intends to select successful Freeport locations that account for and take full advantage of the diverse potential and comparative advantage of different regions of the UK. The Government has confirmed that they remain committed to running a fair, open and transparent bidding process to ensure Freeport locations are selected on the basis of their ability to fulfil our objectives.

The report further outlined the Freeport bid submission process; the proposals; the potential freeport economic impact and advised of the consultation process to date.

OPTIONS

No other options were discussed.

ORDERED

That the Mayor endorse the submission of the bid

REASON

For reasons outlined in the report.

The decisions will come into force with immediate effect and is not subject to scrutiny call-in procedures.