

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 23 June 2021

Subject: Update on impact of COVID 19 on children and families with a focus on family poverty

Report of: Director of Education

Summary

This report, one of a series of scrutiny reports, reports on the impact and consequence management of COVID 19 on children and their families. This report has a particular focus on family poverty and the impact of the pandemic on this. The report outlines the work that has been put in place to try to mitigate this particularly in relation to the provision of food.

Recommendations

Committee is asked to discuss the report, provide comment on the analysis provided within the report.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

Our Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities.	Effective Children and Education Services are critical to ensuring our children are afforded opportunities and supported to connect and contribute to the city's sustainability and growth.
A highly skilled city: world class and home-grown talent sustaining the city's economic success.	Ensuring children and young people are supported and afforded the opportunity to access and achieve in the City; empowered and supported by the delivery of a strong and cohesive system that works for all children.

A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities.	Improving education and social care services that are connected to the wider partnership build the resilience of children and families needed to achieve their potential and be integrated into their communities.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work.	Improving outcomes for the children and families across the City, helps build and develop whole communities and increases the liability of the City
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth.	Successful services support successful families who are able to deliver continuing growth in the City

Contact Officers:

Name: Amanda Corcoran
Position: Director of Education
E-mail: amanda.corcoran@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Angela Harrington
Position: Director of Inclusive Economy
E-mail: angela.harrington@manchester.gov.uk

Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

Since March 2020 each Children and Families Scrutiny Committee has received a report in respect of Covid19, its impact and the Directorate response.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Throughout the COVID 19 pandemic, Manchester's Children and Education services, schools and settings, have sought to continue to ensure the delivery of the services that underpin our children's strategy; our strategic objectives are children live safe, happy, health and successful lives. Overall the partnership has demonstrated flexibility in responding to the challenges of lockdowns and associated restrictions utilised to contain the virus. This has included the majority of schools and settings remaining open throughout the pandemic; providing on site education for vulnerable children and children of key workers and remote education for all other children and young people during periods of national lockdowns and putting in place a range of measures to ensure that children and staff can attend schools and settings safely at other times.
- 1.2 The full extent and impact of Covid19 on the development, life chances and opportunities for the city's children and young people is not yet fully understood and may not be for some time. There are themes/issues emerging or already known:
- The education gap between those children considered to be disadvantaged and their counterparts will have widened.
 - There are indications of increased rates of anxiety and mental health issues,
 - The pandemic has increased inequality in the city; there has been 6% increase in the overall number children being eligible for Free School Meals; In addition, at times, we have seen on average an 150% increase in families accessing foodbanks over the past 12 months and financial hardship becoming a feature of everyday life for many children.
 - Lack of opportunities for young people post school and college are likely to lead to increased levels of Not in Employment Education and Training (NEET) Several children have reported feeling anxious about transition between school/college phases, their future opportunities and feeling isolated/lonely. This appears to have the potential to compromise the aspirations/hopes of young people across the city.
- 1.3 Since 8th March, our schools and settings are once again fully open for all of their cohorts and school attendance has become mandatory again for children who receive their education at school. Overall both staff and children and young people have been reporting how pleased they are to be back on site. However, just as schools were looking forward to potentially removing some of the restrictions that have been place such as the wearing of face masks in secondary schools or allowing primary children to play together at playtimes, due to rising infection rates in the City, our Public Health advice to schools was that they strongly recommended that schools kept in place measures such as the wearing of face masks. Subsequently, on Tuesday 8th June, due to increasing rates of infection as a result of the Delta variant of concern, Manchester was named as an Enhanced Response Area, along with the other 9 Greater Manchester authorities, and schools are currently being advised to continue with all measures in place to reduce spread of infection.

2.0 Responding to COVID cases

2.1 Home testing for secondary pupils and staff across all phases of education continues. Staff including in early years settings, can access LFD home testing kits and families with school age children are still able to access home testing kits online or from locations across the city. As testing in secondary schools for staff and pupils moved to a predominantly home testing model, Public Health colleagues have reported a reduction in data from home testing, indicating home testing or the reporting of results was less frequent in young people. The education team is working closely with Public Health and the Council's communications teams to continue to highlight the importance of weekly testing and develop activity around encouraging and increasing testing and reporting at home.

2.2 As the increase in the transmission of the 'Delta' variant of concern (VOC) became evident, communications were issued to schools highlighting advice from Health colleagues and Government about the vigilance required in reducing transmission by adhering to hygiene and social distancing measures. Resources and materials were provided from the Communications teams community tool kits to highlight messaging for pupils and staff around regular weekly testing and for staff, parents and carers around testing, isolation and vaccination. Parents and carers were also advised that if their child is identified as a contact of positive case, their child should take a PCR test. Therefore, whole school bubbles impacted by a positive case would now be PCR tested.

2.3 During the period 23rd April to 11th June, schools continued to report their positive cases via the online form to the Manchester Test and Trace team (MTAT). The MTAT team have collated this as follows:

- A total of 564 reported cases were submitted to MTAT during this eight-week period
- A total of 10,326 children and 501 adults have been told to self-isolate as a result of COVID-19 during this period
- Positively, the cases reported demonstrate the high proportion of schools who are making their own independent decisions on identifying contacts of reported cases and instructing to self-isolate

2.4 Information reported by schools to MTAT before the half term break ended shows that:

- 74% of all reported cases in school and early years settings were children, 14% were teaching staff and 11% non-teaching staff. An average of 38 children were reported as COVID-19 positive by schools each week
- 37% of all reported cases were experiencing the common symptoms of COVID: persistent cough, high temperature and/or loss of taste or smell
- The majority of reported cases have been in primary or secondary settings
- The number of cases in primary settings has fluctuated week-on week but remains at an average of 15 cases per week
- Reported cases in secondary settings slightly increased over this period, with a weekly average of 19 cases.

- 2.5 As schools begin the new term, incoming reports will be analysed with the above data as a comparator, and it is expected that the increase in PCR testing of contacts should be evident.
- 2.6 The Manchester Test and Trace (MTAT) team is continuing to provide ongoing clinical advice to settings and highlights issues/concerns and potential outbreaks of infection, to Health colleagues and Senior School Quality Assurance officers to ensure support is timely and effective. Health colleagues continue to meet regularly with Education teams to develop strategy around infection in settings including identification of VOCs. Where outbreaks have been identified, a full package of support is provided to settings via 'Outbreak Control Meetings' arranged with setting leaders. These meetings are attended by Health, MTAT, Health & Safety, Education and Communications team. Attendees provide advice to the setting including support around communication with the media and community as required and develop a plan to identify transmission and reduce the impact on the education of pupils. The teams are working effectively to provide expert support to schools, which can often include a strategic crossover into their surrounding community, a recent example being on-site staffed mobile testing units (MTUs) provided to facilitate mass PCR testing of pupils in several settings where outbreaks were identified. Testing was extended to household members of pupils and staff attending the school to further identify asymptomatic cases and reduce transmission in the community. The provision of on-site MTUs in these circumstances was very well received by settings and the community.
- 2.7 Prior to Manchester being announced as an Enhanced Response Area, due to the increase in transmission in the City, the Director of Public Health recommended that schools consider re-introducing the wearing of face coverings in the classrooms and communal areas of secondary schools. School leaders were also invited to a Webinar attended by our Consultant in Public Health and Health and Safety colleagues. The session was very well attended, and feedback was positive. Insight was provided for school leaders into the ongoing VOC situation and reassurance and advice was provided with regard to measures to reduce and control transmission, which included:
- Updates on infection, testing and vaccination data related to schools settings and their communities
 - Reiteration of the messages around vigilance with control and hygiene measures and the Director of Public Health's recommendation to re-introduce face coverings for pupils and staff in classrooms and pupils in communal areas
 - Increased focus on risk assessments and control measures in settings including advice about trips and activities and an offer of ongoing Health and Safety support to those arranging activities.
 - The need to ensure messages such as hand, face, space, regular weekly testing and take up of vaccinations were continuous and clear and also communicated to parents and carers

- 2.8 As Manchester moved into Enhanced Response Area status, the Consultant in public health attended the High School Heads meeting, where further assurances were provided. Leaders were given the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns and were given further advice on risk assessments, testing, face coverings and vaccinations. Further discussions were had in relation to the reintroduction of on site testing in secondary schools and Health teams are working alongside schools in this area going forward.
- 2.9 As Manchester was moved into the Enhanced Response Area status, the Consultant in Public Health attended the High School Heads meeting to provide further updates around the ongoing situation. Leaders were given the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns. They were given further advice on risk assessments, testing, face coverings and vaccinations. Discussions were had in relation to the Government's guidance on reintroduction of onsite testing in secondary schools and Health teams are currently working alongside schools in this area going forward. Communications to schools followed this meeting outlining the advice and responses to frequently asked questions and a reminder of the support available to schools. Over the coming weeks Public Health, Health & Safety, Education and Communications teams and HR Teams will continue to work collaboratively with schools to provide direct and timely support and guidance. Strategic meetings within these teams has increased to consider data, advice and the development of activity around the reduction of transmission and support to schools.

3.0 School Attendance

- 3.1 Overall attendance in mainstream schools continued to be positive. We still have a significant number of pupils abroad who have not returned to school since attendance became mandatory. Many of these pupils are in countries still classified as red and will be required to pay to quarantine on their return. Where possible schools have been trying to make and maintain contact with these families and encourage them to return to school. Schools are following DfE guidance regarding dealing with this situation and it is being monitored by the Local Authority.

Phase	WC 10 May	WC 17 May	WC 24 May
SECONDARY MAINSTREAM	83.11%	88.84%	89.11%
Special School	74.90%	79.80%	80.82%
PRIMARY MAINSTREAM	86.09%	93.00%	94.17%
Overall	83.74%	90.85%	91.31%

- 3.2 The above table shows attendance rates at schools for the three weeks before the May half term. The week commencing 10th May is particularly low as this was Eid. The easing of restrictions allowing families to travel has impacted on attendance generally, with difference between primary (particularly faith schools) and secondary May half term holidays having an impact in the week commencing 24th May. There has also been guidance on register coding from the DfE for those children abroad which no longer allows schools to use the 'X'

Code (not required to attend) for these pupils. There has also been increased parental anxiety around Covid with the increased rates in Greater Manchester.

- 3.3 The Attendance & Exclusion Team continue to operate a telephone helpline and email for schools/families/agencies to use as needed. This has been promoted throughout the year in a variety of formats. Weekly data analysis indicates schools where attendance is lower than expected and support and advice is offered to these schools. The Attendance & Exclusion Team are holding summer term Attendance Clinics in each district.
- 3.4 Special school attendance remains below the level it was during the Autumn term (84.76%). Schools are working with families to encourage them to return children to school, but some families remain concerned about potential risks to their children, especially recently with increased rates across Greater Manchester. A Special School-specific attendance clinic was held in the Spring Term, and following positive feedback, this will be added to our clinic timetable moving forward, with one planned for the summer term.
- 3.5 This academic year there have been 54 permanent exclusions in total with 21 since 8 March 2021 when school were open to all pupils. This is lower than at this time in previous years, however, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from that comparison due to the period of restricted opening during this academic year. Of these permanent exclusions, 15 were from schools outside of Manchester. Only 2 are from a primary school and there have been no exclusions from special schools. The most common reason for exclusion is persistent disruptive behaviour/physical assault on a pupil.

4.0 Family Poverty and impact of pandemic

- 4.1 The Family Poverty Strategy which was officiality launched in 2017, was developed specifically to support children and families living in poverty. The strategy is based on three themes, each underpinned by three major priorities:
 - Sustainable work as a route out of poverty
 - Focus on the basics - raising and protecting family incomes
 - Boosting resilience and building on strengths
- 4.2 More recently, in light of the systemic inequalities and challenges highlighted by Covid-19, to ensure that the strategy continues to meet the priorities for children and families living in poverty over the next 12-18 months, a reprioritisation of the strategy was undertaken (a full reset was not possible as the strategy needed to feed into and from the refreshed Our Manchester Strategy which sets out the overarching vision for the city). The reprioritisation was based on a consultation with each of the working groups which comprise of diverse partners from across the city including the Bread and Butter Thing, One Manchester, GM Poverty Action and Northwards Housing all of whom have expertise in their respective thematic areas. The consensus was that the existing priorities were still pertinent to the needs of children and families living in poverty and needed to be strengthened going forward. In addition, a small number of additional priorities were included such as digital inclusion, which

was highlighted as a particular challenge for vulnerable residents and children and families living in poverty over the lockdown period. As well documented, the pandemic disproportionately impacted on communities with protected characteristics. As such equality, diversity and inclusion was a theme which was consistently identified as a priority and is included in the reprioritisation as an overarching theme.

4.3 The Family Poverty Strategy Reprioritisation was approved by the Family Poverty Core Group (who have overarching responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy) in December 2020.

4.4 The table below sets out the priorities and themes for the Family Poverty Strategy Reprioritisation:

Sustainable work as a route out of poverty
1. Affordable childcare for parents
2. The role of anchor institutions
<i>Additional Priorities</i>
3. Commitment to the Living Wage
Focus on the basics - raising and protecting family incomes
4. Lobbying Government to mitigate the impact of welfare reforms on children and families
5. Tackling the poverty premium
6. Food and fuel
<i>Additional Priorities</i>
7. Debt and financial management
8. Holistic support offer for residents
Boosting resilience and building on strengths
9. Strength based approach in communities (Belonging)
10. Improving the identification and signposting of families in poverty (Coping)

4.5 One of the most significant issues to emerge from the pandemic for children and families living in poverty is in relation to food support. The Council's food response was first developed in April 2020 to ensure that vulnerable residents could access a food offer.

4.6 Residents were initially provided with food deliveries – both directly from the City Council but also from commissioned providers – and then, when appropriate, stepped down to mainstream food provision, through the use of local Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) food providers, and a network of Neighbourhood Teams, Early Help and volunteers. From July 2020 onwards, the City Council moved the model of support into a commissioning model, utilising the VCS offer to ensure that residents were supported, either through directly commissioned food deliveries (paid for by the City Council and administered by the Food Response Team), through community providers

(food banks, pantries and mutual aid organisations), or newly established mainstream mechanisms (e.g. DEFRA which prioritised supermarket deliveries).

- 4.7 At the initial peak of lockdown, the City Council Food Response was directly supporting approximately 500 households per week, and co-ordinating VCS provision to a further 200+. In the second 'peak' of lockdown (early November 2020), approximately 250 households per week were supported either with one off deliveries, or ongoing support. In total, the City Council Food Response have directly delivered or commissioned over 125,000 food deliveries. Analysis of request for food support via the City Council's Community Response Helpline since the start of the pandemic shows that 51% of households requesting support were single adult households. Households headed by single parents were the next biggest cohort. This has been consistent over the past 15 months through the various lock downs although the peak of demand wasn't replicated following the initial lockdown period. Clinical vulnerability was the initial driver of demand for food but this was quickly replaced by financial vulnerability, with many households falling into a number of categories.
- 4.8 In response to the complexity and the demand around the food support offer, the Our Manchester Food Partnership was established in autumn last year. The Manchester Food Partnership which engages over 60 food support providers, and other associated stakeholders, such as Housing Associations, Social Care, and Citizens Advice, meets on a regular basis and has held a number of engagement events. A food action plan for the city is planned for later this year.
- 4.9 Where there was ongoing demand or need for food, families with children were referred to the Early Help Hub and there is a good relationship between the teams to ensure that families with children are stepped down to community provision appropriately and are supported with wider issues such as debt. There isn't a similar offer in place for vulnerable adults. As well as establishing referrals pathways into community food support provision, the team have engaged residents in appropriate 'wrap-around' support which includes Social Care, Early Help and poverty mitigation support (e.g. Revenues and Benefits, Citizens Advice Bureau and the Digital Champions Network). Currently the food response team are supporting approximately 40 households per week and have recently agreed a new referral pathway with NHS Track and Trace Team, which again is supporting residents who have no access to the mainstream food offer. The team are proactively planning for upcoming changes to lockdown support mechanisms such as the end of furlough and the ending of Universal Credit top-up.
- 4.10 The Team is actively planning for upcoming changes to national lockdown support mechanisms such as the ending of furlough and the top-up to Universal Credit. These are Central Government initiatives which have provided some resilience for families and adults on low incomes. Businesses that have been shut-down or had significantly reduced business have been able to place staff on furlough rather than making them redundant with Central Government providing a wage contribution of 80% of an employees salary up to £2,500 per month. Government contribution drops to 70% of wages in July, 60% in

August and September, at which point it ceases. Universal Credit claimants have received an additional £20 per week uplift. For a young person under the age of 25 that has meant their allowance during Covid has been £342.72 per month, which will drop back to £257.33 from October. A couple with at least one person over the age of 25 are receiving a monthly UC allowance of £594 currently, which will drop back to £509.91 in October when the Universal Credit uplift ends. There were 30,200 Manchester residents on furlough in May 2020, with the number decreasing since March and significantly below the July 2020 peak of 49,900 residents on furlough. Prospects in the Manchester economy look promising and even in sectors that have been hard hit such as hospitality there are reports of employment vacancies. However, there are risks for when these initiatives end in September. Throughout the last academic year there has also been provision to replace free school meals during holidays for families with children which has also been a protective factor.

5.0 Supermarket vouchers for children/young people

- 5.1 Just under £4m of supermarket vouchers and support for other essentials has been provided to children and young people in the City to help in some way towards tackling school holiday hunger since Christmas and during February half term, Easter and May half term. The allocation was £15 per child per week. This has been funded through several allocations of grant funding from the Government.
- 5.2 School census able data shows that in January 2021 approximately 32,000 children and young people at Manchester schools were eligible for free school meals - which is around 37% of all pupils in the city's schools. This is an increase of around 2,000 since the start of the pandemic back in March last year. Due to the ongoing economic impact of the pandemic this number was expected to increase, so a contingency was set aside to ensure that no family that became eligible for support between January and May half term missed out.
- 5.3 As well as making sure all those pupils currently eligible for free school meals did not go hungry over the holidays, the Council's offer also included other children and young people who are not usually considered for support under any national scheme.
- 5.4 These included school sixth-formers whose families meet the criteria for free school meals or who previously accessed free school meals when they were under 16, and an estimated 7,000 additional children aged under five who attend early years settings and whose families meet the criteria for free school meals and who may be vulnerable during the holidays due to the setting's closure. The scheme also supported children in vulnerable families known to schools who are outside the scope of free school meals but where an early help assessment has identified that they require extra support during the school holidays.

5.5 Other beneficiaries also supported through the scheme included care-leavers, children of families that are classed as having no recourse to public funds, asylum seekers and refugee children, and nursery-age children who currently do not receive free school meals but who would be eligible for them.

6.0 Welfare payments

6.1 In addition to providing food vouchers the Council provided a welfare payment paid directly to family to cover other bills such as utility costs. Referrals for over 2,000 families were made to the scheme by schools. The welfare payment was £65per child and capped at £260 per family. Around £200k of the £4m quoted above was allocated this scheme.

7.0 Holiday Activity and Food Scheme

7.1 The Local Authority has also been allocated grant funding of **£3,827,200** to provide Holiday Activities and Food (HAF). An initial programme of activities took place over the Easter break and a further programme is currently being planned for the summer holiday period. The aims of the project are:

- Support for FSM eligible children and families
- Enriching and inclusive activities
- Healthy Food

7.2 The HAF Programme is designed to provide food, enriching activities and fun during the Easter, Summer and Christmas holiday periods so that children and young people can return to school ready to learn. It aims to address the issues for children and young people which go much deeper than food poverty.

7.3 We know that school holidays can be a challenging time for some families due to increased costs, such as food and childcare and reduced incomes, and for some children this could result in gaps in accessing organised out-of-school activities, which may result in 'unhealthy holidays' in terms of nutrition and physical health and are more likely to experience social isolation. Free holiday clubs are a response to this issue and can have a positive impact on children and young people. We know they work best when they can provide varied, fun, inclusive, accessible activities and the provision of nutritious food and nutritional advice.

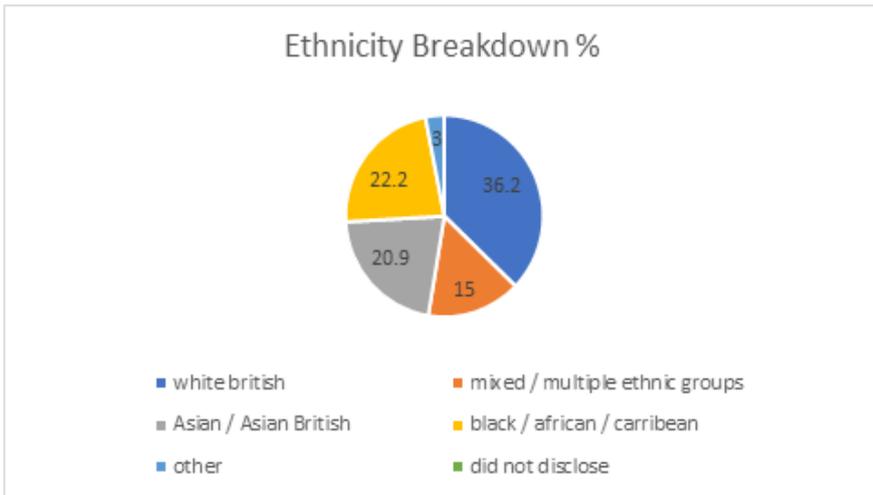
7.4 The table below contains the data breakdown from across the Easter provision, each provision had at least 1 quality assurance visit, with all visits following the same visit criteria.

Provision Type	No. of providers	No. of sessions	No. of participants	No. of visits
Schools	18	141	743	2052
Out of School Settings	7	30	146	449
Youth & Play	35	294	1539	4974

Sport & Leisure	10	106	966	2023
Total	70	571	3394	9489

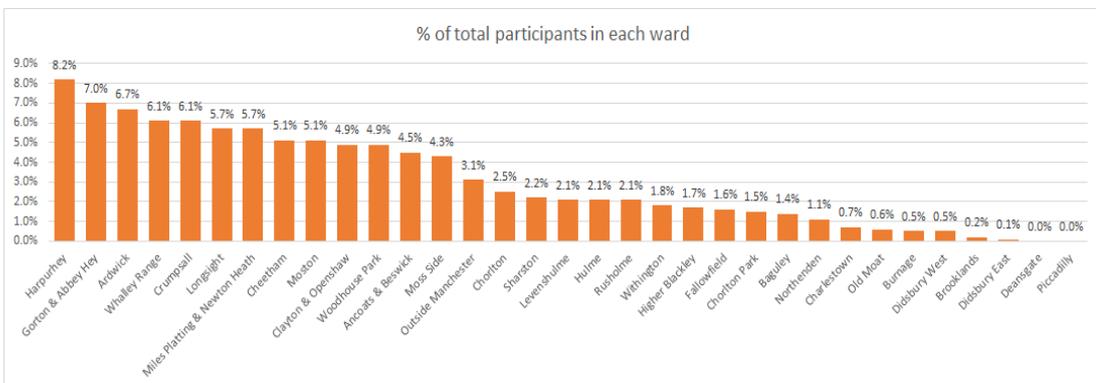
7.5 **75%** of all participants were in receipt of benefit related free school meals, with match funding from universal holiday provision ensuring access for those children and young people targeted by providers. The monitoring data received highlights that more boys (**55%**) than girls (**45%**) participated in activities across the City. **64%** of participants were aged 5-10 and **36%** aged 11-16

7.6



7.7 Each provision provided a food offer as part of their HAF provision, alongside this there were **2168** food parcels provided to families, **316** nutritional awareness sessions delivered, and **569** participants received additional support, such as, food outside of sessions.

7.8 The chart below shows the percentage of participants who attended from each ward across the city. When mapped against FSM data, it shows we had provision in areas where there are high levels of children & young people receiving FSM, however, we need to ensure we target Higher Blackley & Charlestown more for the summer delivery.



8.0 Conclusion and next steps

- 8.1 COVID 19 continues to have a significant impact on the lives and experiences of children and young people in the City. Recent increasing rates of infection in the City due to the Delta Variant of Concern has also meant that we are continuing to see outbreaks of infection in some of our schools; secondary school staff and pupils have been asked by the Director of Public Health to continue to wear masks in classrooms as well as communal areas and schools and settings are continuing to keep measures in place in school to reduce the spread of infection.
- 8.2 There have been a number of different responses across the City to ensure that children and young people have access to food during school holidays and these have been described in the report. Work is ongoing to develop and coordinate an offer which cover the summer holidays which will include the holiday activity and food scheme. However, currently it is unclear whether there will be any additional funding available to supplement this.