

2 REPORT ON THE DELIVERY OF THE SERVICE DURING THE ENFORCED SCHOOL CLOSURES 29 NOVEMBER – 3 DECEMBER 2010

The heavy snow and exceptionally cold weather which hit West Lothian at the end of November 2010 created the worst conditions the county had experienced for almost 50 years.

The Education Executive considered a report by the Depute Chief Executive (which had been had been circulated) advising that the severe weather and resultant disruption to road and rail travel had also impacted on West Lothian's schools. On the grounds of health and safety, the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Planning and Area Services) took a decision at 6.45 am on Monday 29 November to close all West Lothian schools and council nurseries. The severity of the weather conditions caused the Chief Executive to call together the Severe Weather Emergency Management Team (SWEMT) on the Monday morning, and the team continued to meet twice daily for the rest of that week. Each afternoon a decision was taken on schools based on the available weather information and schools access. Schools remained closed for the whole week.

The massive disruption to learning had to be addressed as quickly as possible and immediately on Monday 29 November, Education Officers contacted Head Teachers to agree strategies. Many Head Teachers had already contacted their teaching staff to plan the preparation of on-line learning materials using both the school website and Glow, the on-line learning resource managed by Learning and Teaching Scotland.

Throughout the week 29 November – 3 December many West Lothian teachers provided work for their pupils via on-line services and parents and carers were directed to these sites through Group Call, the council's Facebook page and the council's website. Estimates were awaited from schools on how many children accessed online materials although early indications were that it was significant.

The report included appendices which illustrated the variety of work prepared by teachers and undertaken by children during the closure week. Preparations were underway in every West Lothian school to ensure continuity of learning in the event of further closures due to severe weather or any other incident which forced a school to close. In addition, schools were preparing a programme of twilight classes beginning in January and a larger Easter revision programme to support children studying for national examinations.

The Head of Education would meet with Head Teachers early in 2011 to agree a formal provision of learning during times of emergency and present a report to the Education Policy Development Scrutiny Panel in due course.

The Depute Chief Executive recommended that the Education Executive note the content of the report and agree to submit a report to the Education PDSP on improving continuity of education during severe weather incidents or building failure.

Decisions

1. To approve the terms of the report.
2. That when the follow-up report was submitted to the Education Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel, information on the usage of Glow should also be included.
3. To thank the academic community for their efforts in continuing to deliver the school curriculum during the severe weather conditions recently experienced.