

Cheshire East Children's Services – Winter learning

From: HOWELL, Rick
Subject: Winter learning

SUMMARY:

Our overall aim is to keep children and staff safe while enabling continuity of all services. A primary role is to gather and distribute accurate and timely information, advice and guidance to support this.

On the whole we managed to deliver this role successfully but there are some critical learning points around the extent to which we managed to collect and present information in 'real time' in a coherent way and the quality of our knowledge and relationships with corporate colleagues.

Related issues and learning

- 1) It is not the role of the LA to advise parents/children/staff of the opening/closure of schools. The duty for this rests with individual schools (Heads/governors). It is our role to co-ordinate and manage the information flow regarding children's centres and other LA managed sites.
- 2) On a day by day basis we need to have an early as possible and accurate picture of which sites (including schools) were open/closed and liaise with relevant media, schools, transport, school meals and customer services. This information is also reported to members, corporate colleagues and our own Children and Families staff.

Key issues

- ❖ A learning point is that particularly schools (but also children's centres) must have in place arrangements to deliver their duty to communicate via
 - Use of radio
 - Telephone answer-phone
 - (School) website
 - Notice on gates
 - ❖ Schools (and other sites) need a system in place with their staff regarding notification of opening and closure.
 - ❖ Schools (and other sites) need agreed contingency arrangements around what level of staffing is appropriate to open safely and considerations of additional costs to keep the school/site open
- 3) We need to support schools and other sites to open when the conditions prevent access or safe travel around or up to the school/site. To include Highways, United Utilities et al.

Key issues

- ❖ A learning point is that we need to formalise the links between particularly Highways re names, contacts, plans etc

- 4) We have a specific role around offering 'advice' and support to Head teachers and Governors around risk assessment and decision making.

Key issues

- ❖ A learning point is that we need to ensure schools have access to a number of staff at times when they need support to make decisions
- 5) The LA should ensure it delivers its monitoring and challenge role in ensuring that schools follow a formal process (after closure) to decide if and how they are able to make up some or all of the time lost.
- ❖ The LA should confirm the process for monitoring and reporting on closures and ensure that governing bodies confirm their approach to delivering the statutory 190 days of learning.
- 6) The LA ensures all statutory duties for assessment and delivery continue in relation to Children's Social Care.
- ❖ The LA should have knowledge of where all staff travel from to ensure that priorities can be co-ordinated in relation to reviews, home visits, or assessment.

How could we respond quicker to the needs of vulnerable groups?

Need to identify in advance those schools, services and settings most at risk of being affected by adverse winter conditions. To include a forward plan to reference

- Staff access to sites: including home – work distance
- Transportation and travel management/support: including footpaths and site clearance
- Media and communications plans in place - need overall system to ensure 'real time' communications of open/ closures

How can we better involve partners?

- Met office advice, information and guidance was excellent and needs to be briefed more widely
- Need to include particularly health partners in the emergency planning of services delivered, for example co-ordinating staff undertaking visits to children at risk when in need or at risk.

How can town and parish network/third sector building resilience?

- Town and parish councils could co-ordinate with head teachers a community effort to clear a school site

Other Learning:

- Media need managing to ensure appropriate passwords are used for reported closures
- Key contacts maps for whole LA
- Business continuity training for schools
- Central co-ordination needs single designated response point with a Children and Adults perspective
- Unannounced visits managed via having nominated staff, living locally
- Need to know where staff are travelling from to work place in advance of emergency
- Explore with Health potential for them to support safety/unannounced visits
- Issue about childcare and schools and our own emergency staff accessing information

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