

North Lanarkshire Council

Report

Education and Families Committee

approval noting

Ref AM/DB

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Club 365 Model in the Recovery Phase

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Executive Summary

Club 365 is a sector leading North Lanarkshire initiative intended to tackle holiday and weekend hunger, which can have a negative impact on children and young people's ability to learn and their general health and wellbeing. It was established in recognition of the fact that evidence suggests children and families are particularly vulnerable during school holidays.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused more families to experience poverty through reduced working hours, furlough schemes, unemployment and heightened social isolation from extended families and friends. In this context the support offered to children through Club 365 contributes to the Council's broader anti-poverty strategy.

Scottish Government published advice on 30th July 2020 to assist local authorities to plan for the start of the new school term in August 2020. This guidance outlines many restrictions and mitigating actions that require to remain in place in educational settings during phase 3 of recovery. These measures directly impact on the planned delivery model of Club 365 with continued disruption forecast at present due to increasing COVID-19 cases in Lanarkshire.

This report provides Education and Families Committee with information to allow a decision to be made on the operating model for Club 365 during this phase of recovery.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Education & Families Committee:

- (i) Note the contents of the report
- (ii) Approve the proposed interim Club 365 Voucher Scheme, explained in Section 2.2 of the report.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority All priorities

Ambition statement (9) Invest in early interventions, positive transitions, and preventative approaches to improve outcomes for children and young people

1. Background

- 1.1 All North Lanarkshire schools were closed for educational purposes from March 2020 through to the end of the summer term due to the current COVID-19 pandemic.
 - 1.2 For the period 23 March until 24 June 2020, North Lanarkshire Council took an early decision to implement a voucher scheme for all pupils who were eligible to free meal entitlement (FME). This included the universal P1 – P3 pupil cohort. It is important to note that North Lanarkshire was one of only a few councils to implement a voucher scheme based on universal entitlement.
 - 1.3 The vouchers equated to £20 per pupil per week and were issued via SMS code to parents' mobile phones. Parents could thereafter redeem the vouchers in any retail outlet operating PayPoint.
 - 1.4 In addition to voucher payments, vulnerable children could also access one of 9 'Hubs', where lunches were provided. These Hubs operated 7 days per week from 20th March to the 24th June 2020.
 - 1.5 From the start of the school summer break on 25th June through to 11th August 2020, the voucher scheme was continued for pupils who would have been entitled to a FME through the income related award criteria. In this instance the provision of vouchers to P1 – P3 pupils was based on clothing grant awards.
 - 1.6 A phased return to school for North Lanarkshire pupils began on 12th August 2020. This phased return was fully implemented by 14th August 2020, when all pupils returned to full time in-school education.
 - 1.7 Club 365 did not operate during the period 23rd March 2020 until 14th August 2020, as the aforementioned contingency plans were in place.
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2.1 Report

- 2.1.1 The Scottish Government published [Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis](#) document on 21st May 2020. This document outlined 4 distinct recovery phases and the associated actions and restrictions to be applied during each phase.
- 2.1.2 On the 9th July 2020, the Scottish Government announced that local authorities would move onto [phase 3](#) of the recovery plan.
- 2.1.3 Included within phase 3 was the planned full reopening of schools, provided there was continued suppression of the virus. During this period authorities were also asked, as part of their contingency planning, to continue development of a blended learning model.
- 2.1.4 Subsequent Scottish Government [advice and guidance](#) was published on 30th July 2020, to assist local authorities to plan for the start of the new school term in August 2020.
- 2.1.5 This guidance outlines many restrictions and mitigating actions that are required to help minimise COVID related health and safety risks for pupils, staff and visitors to educational establishments. These measures will remain in place for the foreseeable future and will be revised as necessary following the issue of updated Scottish

Government guidance. Indeed this [advice and guidance](#) states 'Movement between schools should be kept to a minimum, until further notice.'

- 2.1.6 A key instruction to authorities is to ensure children and young people are kept in social bubbles wherever possible. In practice this means pupils have not to share resources, minimise contact with other peer groups, and that there is no indoor physical education (PE) sessions.
- 2.1.7 It should be noted that all aspects of educational service delivery are subject to risk assessment, a key component of which is to ensure the health and safety of those affected by programmes. In the current context, the purpose of risk assessment is to identify the best way to ensure delivery, whilst mitigating risk.
- 2.1.8 The above measures directly impact on the planned delivery model of Club 365, particularly in relation to the wrap around sports/leisure/educational activities which are a key element of the planned programme. This would lead to large scale involvement of pupils beyond their school bubbles and communities and is a major risk.

As a consequence, the Service has considered a revised delivery proposal, as outlined in section 2.2 below.

- 2.1.9 The proposal is specifically for the period 1st September 2020 through to the end of the financial year on 31st March 2021. The Service will prepare a future report on Club 365 including recommendations for delivery options for the period post April 2021. This report will be completed during February 2021 and will take cognisance of the prevailing government COVID health and safety advice, and available funding.

2.2 Towards a COVID-19 Compliant Club 365 Model

2.2.1 Committee Approved Delivery Model

The Committee approved Club 365 model is of 18 hubs operating over holiday periods plus 8 hubs operating over term time weekends. In the current context, bringing children together from across school communities does not comply with current government guidance for phase 3 recovery (see Section 2.1.5). The club/hub activity, such as was envisaged in the committee approved model, is not currently viable.

- 2.2.2 The challenge in assessing viable options for delivery in this COVID-19 context was discussed at a recent corporate Recovery Group meeting and the Corporate Management Team. The result of these discussions is a clear and agreed officer recommendation to implement a voucher scheme for Club 365 on an interim basis for the financial year, so as to enact the express political intention of North Lanarkshire Council, as determined in the budget setting process of February 2020.
- 2.2.3 The 2020/21 budget for Club 365 activity is £1.090m with expenditure originally planned as follows:

Table 1

Club 365 Programme 2020/21	Approved Budget £'000
Hub Provision (18 hubs during holiday periods & 8 hubs during term time)	890
Connecting Families	200
Total	1,090

During 2020/21, planned Club 365 activity has not taken place due to operational restrictions and concerns linked to the COVID-19 outbreak. However within North Lanarkshire, vulnerable children and families have instead received ongoing support through alternative arrangements such as locality hubs and FME voucher payments.

The costs and funding of these alternative arrangements have previously been factored into the Service/Council COVID-19 financial projections for 2020/21.

As a result the full £1.090m budget is available to support an alternative Club 365 delivery model for the remainder (September 2020 – March 2021) of the current financial year.

- 2.2.4 In determining the pupil cohort who would be eligible for Club 365 support during the period September 2020 to March 2021, and forecast participation rates, there are a number of factors to consider.

Firstly the Club 365 delivery model approved at the Policy and Strategy Committee on 31st January 2020 outlined access to all primary aged pupils entitled to FME, including the universal P1 – P3 FME pupils.

In accordance with Scottish Government guidance, the Council has introduced programmes that have targeted support to pupils/families most in need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this regard the April to June 2020 (£20 per week) voucher programme was provided to pupils in receipt of a FME, including the universal P1 – P3 FME pupils. The summer voucher programme (£15 per week) was restricted to only include pupils who qualified for a FME per the parental income criteria, with P1 – P3 pupils assessed via clothing grant awards.

Based on data from April to August 2020, the weekly redemption rate of vouchers was between 85% – 90%. If a new voucher scheme is introduced, a similar attrition rate of 10% could be assumed.

Table 2

Club 365 Model (COVID Recovery)				
Forecast Daily Participation Rates Per Pupil Cohort				
	P1 – P7	P1 – P7 FME (Universal)	P1 – P7 FME (Income Criteria)	Club 365 (2019/20)
Total Pupils	21,711	14,858	5,854	N/A
Less 10% Attrition	(2,171)	(1,486)	(585)	N/A
Daily Participation	19,540	13,372	5,269	249

It would be anticipated that any planned further use of such a voucher scheme to enable Club 365 delivery would target those families most in need, and who qualify under revenue and benefits criteria for free school meals.

2.2.5 Proposed Club 365 Voucher Scheme

The Corporate Management Team recently concluded that the only viable option which best met current COVID-19 restrictions (see section 2.1.5/6/7) available to North Lanarkshire Council was to utilise the emergency Free School Meal Voucher system, as was established during the initial phase of the COVID-19 emergency lockdown

period, as a means to deliver Club 365 during the Recovery Phase, and to utilise the available budget of £1.090 million to do so.

During the period 15th August 2020 to 31st March 2021 there are 85 planned Club 365 days including weekends and holidays. The voucher option highlighted below assumes payments would be made in respect of all 85 days.

Payments would be made *automatically* on a 4 weekly basis using the same Mobile Phone Text/Paypoint approach as previous voucher schemes.

The table below (Table 3) describes how officers would seek to use available budget to support families for Club 365 in the current financial year. This assumes a daily rate of payment to families of £2.43.

Table 3

Club 365 Voucher Option (£2.43 per day)	P1 – P7 FME Income Criteria
Assumed Pupils	5,269
Number of Days	85
Daily Rate	£2.43
Forecast Cost	£1.090m
Club 365 Budget	£1.090m
Projected (Overspend)/Underspend	Break Even

3. Equality and Diversity

3.1 Fairer Scotland

Work carried out during the recovery phase will follow any relevant national policy relating to the Fairer Scotland agenda.

3.2 Equality Impact Assessment

Equality impact assessments have been undertaken in line with Council policy, to ensure Scottish Government guidance is followed.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Impact

At the Policy and Strategy Committee on 31/03/2020 funding of £1.090m was approved for the continuation of the Club 365 programme and the implementation of the Connecting Families Initiative.

4.2 HR/Policy/Legislative Impact

There is no HR or legislative impacts as a result of these recommendations.

4.3 Environmental Impact

There are no environmental impacts as result of these recommendation.

4.4 Risk Impact

Consideration has been given to risks relating to service delivery, HR, legal, finance, reputation and pupil safety.

The Service has sought assurance from the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) that the introduction of a Club 365 voucher scheme would not adversely impact on claimant's existing benefit entitlements. The DWP has confirmed that payments of this nature would not adversely impact on benefit levels during the COVID-19 emergency period. This position would have to be monitored closely and if the DWP stance altered the Service would have to cease Club 365 payments and consider other options to support these families.

5. Measures of success

The option presented continues to support the Council's key objectives for Club 365, having a positive impact on improving outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

6. Supporting documents

- 6.1 [Club 365 Programme Review & Evaluation Report – Policy & Strategy Committee 31/01/2020.](#)
- 6.2 [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020](#)



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