

ANGUS COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 19 OCTOBER 2011

SEVERE WEATHER ARRANGEMENTS

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

This report brings to the attention of the Education Committee updated arrangements for preparing for severe weather.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Education Committee note the contents of this report.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 It is important to ensure that in severe weather the safety and wellbeing of children and staff is of paramount importance. Mutual trust between parents and schools needs to be nurtured so that emergency situations can be tackled in partnership. Within this context, for a number of years, the department has put the following arrangements in place to deal with the impact of Severe Weather.

- advice leaflets have been distributed to staff, (with additional advice provided to Head Teachers) and parents
- information is provided via Internet, Radio Tay, Tay Connect and the Access Line
- each member of staff has a nominated alternative workplace, close to their home. In the event of an individual base location being closed, or the individual cannot travel there he/she should attempt to journey to their nominated alternative school
- effective communication between colleagues is encouraged.

2.2 It is important to note that it is parental responsibility to get pupils to and from school. Accordingly, even if a school is open during severe weather conditions, parents are entitled to keep their children at home, if they have any safety concerns whatsoever.

2.3 In the event of similar weather conditions of a serious nature prevailing across the County, a blanket decision on school closures may be possible. However, the geographical make-up of Angus means that different weather conditions quite frequently prevail in different parts of the County; in these circumstances blanket decisions on school closures/openings will not normally be made for Angus as a whole, although blanket decisions for an individual burgh continue to be seen as essential.

2.4 The situation of each rural school is unique, and Head Teachers of individual rural schools are given discretion about when closure is appropriate due to severe weather.

2.5 Within each burgh, there is an expectation that consultation between Head Teachers of all schools in the burgh (primary and secondary) will take place prior to any decision being taken which will normally apply to all schools in the burgh.

3. WINTER 2010/11

- 3.1 Generally, the arrangements that were in place for winter 2010/10 were effective. In Angus there was only blanket closure on 1 December 2011 and generally the number of days schools were closed was relatively low (when compared to other authorities).
- 3.2 There were many examples of staff showing admirable resilience in their efforts to overcome the effects of unusually adverse weather conditions. Without the commitment of many staff in the education service, and in other Angus Council services, who worked extremely hard often above and beyond the call of duty, it would have proved very difficult to keep open all those schools which managed to open. It was undoubtedly the case that large numbers of staff who, often at considerable personal inconvenience, worked around transport and childcare difficulties to get to work.
- 3.3 Notwithstanding these achievements, a number of issues emerged locally and nationally which have led to a review of procedures.

4. PROPOSALS 2011/12

- 4.1 Within Angus, there has been consultation with a range of colleagues including Teachers' Professional Associations. As a result, a range of actions have been agreed including:-
- revised leaflets for staff and parents have been prepared
 - while it generally operates effectively, minor changes to relevant Internet pages have been implemented
 - implementation of BT "MeetMe Greet Me" Audio Conferencing to improve communication for Head Teachers and key managers
 - updated priority routes for snow clearing on roads/paths in the vicinity of schools
 - greater use of technology to ensure good communication arrangements are in place across the authority and within individual establishments
 - improved information regarding school transport. These improvements to arrangements have been implemented, working with colleagues in other Council Departments.
- 4.2 It is absolutely clear that a decision to close or to keep open a school will often attract equal criticism from one quarter or another. That was most certainly our experience last winter. In these circumstances, it is important to continue to assure staff and parents that a decision to keep open a school is always based on the best available information about manageable weather and travel conditions. In the case of pupils who are not entitled to school transport, the responsibility for their safe travel to and from school rests unambiguously with parents, and not with Head Teacher or the education authority.
- 4.3 The Association of Directors of Education in Scotland in their submission to COSLA Severe Weather Review Task Group highlighted a number of areas of good practice and also areas for authorities to consider. This included consideration of the use of social networking media, availability of call centres and collaboration with neighbouring local authorities. These are being considered and, if appropriate, further changes to our operating procedures will be implemented.

5. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no Human Rights implications arising from consideration of this report.

6. RISK

- 6.1 This report does not require any specific risk issues to be addressed.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising directly as a result of the consideration of this report.

8. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The issues dealt with in this report have been the subject of consideration from an equalities perspective. An [equalities impact assessment](#) has been undertaken.

9. SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT

- 9.1 This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Single Outcome Agreement 2011-2014.

- Individuals are supported in their own communities with good quality services.

10. CONSULTATION

- 10.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services, Head of Finance and Head of Law and Administration and Managing Director, Tayside Contracts, have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

**NEIL LOGUE
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

E/CTC