

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT

1. Meeting:	Cabinet
2. Date:	3 November 2010
3. Title:	Scrutiny Review - School Closure Due to Extreme Weather
4. Directorate:	Chief Executive's All wards

5. Summary

The report sets out the findings and recommendations of the scrutiny review into 'School closure due to extreme weather', undertaken by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel. The report and findings was endorsed by Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel and Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee at their meetings of 15 October 2010 and 22 October 2010 respectively. The report is attached as Appendix 1.

6. Recommendations

- a. That Cabinet receives the report and recommendations**
- b. That the response of Cabinet to the recommendations be fed back to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel within two months of the report's submission to Cabinet.**

7. Proposals and Details

7.1 Last winter was confirmed as the coldest since 1978-79. The heavy snowfall on Tuesday 5th January 2010 and prolonged period of freezing temperature caused considerable disruption to a number of services, including schools, public transport and businesses. The following day almost 90% of Rotherham schools were closed.

7.2 Questions were raised about the procedures for closure of schools during periods of adverse weather or in other emergencies. The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel was asked to undertake a short review to see if lessons can be learnt to ensure that future disruption is minimised.

The review, chaired by Cllr Ann Russell, looked at:

- current policy and legal responsibilities
- operational arrangements – what is in place locally and how does this compare with practice elsewhere?
- can other support be provided?
- how we communicate closure to parents

7.3 The review began its evidence gathering in February 2010. Interviews were organised with the Cabinet Members and relevant officers. In addition, the review group received written submissions and spoke to a number of Headteachers and Senior Staff from Primary and Secondary Schools.

7.4 The recommendations from the review are detailed in Section 6 of the review and include:

- The Local Authority should reissue the guidance to schools with an emphasis on the presumption that schools should remain open unless faced by extraordinary circumstances;
- The Local Authority should collate strategies or actions that have or would assist in maintaining a “school open” status. This good practice should be shared with colleagues across cluster groups and wider school communities and used to inform their business continuity planning to cover extreme weather.
- Children and Young People's Services with Human Resources, should explore with schools the feasibility of teachers and support staff being re-directed to their nearest school to help deal with staffing shortages, to keep schools closures to a minimum;
- Priority salting routes are reviewed to accommodate schools wherever possible;
- The RMBC ‘school closure’ web page is redesigned with the capacity to instantly ‘capture’ information for each school and linked to other relevant pages on the RMBC website.

7.5 The report was submitted to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel on 15 October 2010 and PSOC on 22 October 2010.

8. Finance

A number of the review recommendations may have financial implications if adopted. This would require further exploration by the Strategic Leadership Team and Schools on the cost, risks and benefits of their implementation.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

In circumstances of extreme weather conditions, the decision to close a school is delegated to its Headteacher in consultation with their chair of governors. Given the likelihood of extreme weather events occurring more frequently in future years, the Local Authority and schools should work together develop comprehensive plans to mitigate against potential disruption.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

See main body of report

Although this review focuses on the closure of schools during periods of adverse weather, other pressures on schools (as demonstrated by the 2007 flooding and the recent threats of flu-pandemic) may require emergency decisions about how to keep the school open.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

The report has been circulated to all agencies/individuals that participated in the review for their comments and to check for factual accuracy.

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel – 15 October 2010
Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee – 22 October 2010

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