

People and Communities Select Committee
17 July 2020

Item 5; Public Questions

Question from Sandy Lysaght

While I recognise the fact that schools have done their best to provide online resources for learning at home - this hasn't helped families who don't have access to the appropriate technology. What is being done to stop kids from being technologically disadvantaged?

Response from the Chairman:

Schools have used a range of ways to support families who may not have access to laptops or computers at home. Some have produced hard copy packs of resources and delivered them to families or made them available for families to collect. Technically schools were not required to provide additional learning whilst the schools were closed between the end of March and June 1st. However, they were encouraged to do what they could. Schools have purchased laptops for children using Pupil premium funding and for 1800 children with a social worker the national laptop scheme has been made available. We have also sourced some laptops for certain young people who are currently not in education. To support home learning over the summer we are providing hard copy packs of a resource pack for some schools, prioritising those with high levels of disadvantaged children and young people. For all schools we will provide a downloadable link to these resources so that they can print for families where they can. This resource links to the school curriculum. In addition, thousands of summer fun activity packs for 6 – 11 year olds and their families have been produced in partnership with the library service which will be distributed to children and families over the next couple of weeks.

Supplementary Question from Sandy Lysaght:

Apart from using the free school meals indicator, what other monitoring methods are used by the council to determine childhood poverty? What method was used to assess and distribute the 1800 laptops for school children?

Response from the Chairman

Free school meals is the indicator of financial disadvantage used by the education system. It does not determine whether children are living in poverty. The council does not determine childhood poverty. There are services at both a county level and District level that will support families who experience significant financial hardship. The national scheme to provide laptops for children with a social worker had some prescribed criteria which we followed. Norfolk social workers reviewed the list of children with a social worker. These lists are then checked with schools to determine which children would benefit from a laptop in line with DfE guidance. We had an allocation of 1800 so we had to prioritise those, in an appropriate age bracket, who could make best use of them.

Item 6; Local Member Issues/Questions:

Question from Cllr Mick Castle:

Can the Chair confirm that the Select Committee will give consideration during this municipal year to the issue of Boys' under-performance in Norfolk schools? From a Policy Development point of view the Select Committee could usefully consider what changes are required in terms of the culture of schools, curriculum and teaching methods to secure better engagement by boys.

There is not an immense amount of research at national level but establishing a "Task & Finish" approach to review best practice may help bring forward some effective strategies to pilot over the next couple of years.

Response from the Chairman:

The elected member has raised this issues on a number of occasions. We have at each point modified the view expressed about boys performance in Norfolk in that it is similar to that nationally. Furthermore, we have indicated that it is not the role of the council to prescribe approaches to delivering teaching and learning and curriculum, other than enabling schools to purchase support that they determine. It is not our intention to establish a task and finish group at this time. The school curriculum will be significantly modified in order that all children and young people will be enabled to catch up, if they have fallen behind as a result of COVID.

The chairman has requested for this to be added to the forward work programme so that a report can be brought back to the Committee.