

## **Response by Children and Young People’s Directorate**

### **Impact**

#### **1. Schools and School Transport**

All 103 schools were affected by the severe weather, to a greater or lesser degree, over a total of 8 days in January 2010:

<b>Date</b>	<b>No. of schools closed</b>	<b>No. of pupil days lost</b>
5 <sup>th</sup> January	79	17,973
6 <sup>th</sup> January	102.5 (one half day closure)	22,664
7 <sup>th</sup> January	103	22,696
8 <sup>th</sup> January	56	15,355
11 <sup>th</sup> January	20	7,015
12 <sup>th</sup> January	2	936
14 <sup>th</sup> January	10	1,465
20 <sup>th</sup> January	11	1,433
	<b>Total</b>	<b>89,537</b>

A total of 89,537 pupil days were lost through school closures, which equates to 2.1% of the total number of pupils days in the school year. Some schools were able to open to enable exams to be taken, some part opening solely for those pupils needing to sit exams.

Schools, as is usual in circumstances where days are lost to bad weather, have taken steps to ensure that pupils’ learning targets are not compromised by the lost school days.

#### **What went well**

- There is an established ‘Emergency School Closure’ procedure (attached)
- This procedure was re-communicated to schools immediately in advance of the severe weather, to act as a reminder to Headteachers and to ensure ease of reference
- When all schools were closed, the local authority took a decision to deviate from the Emergency School Closure procedure. Schools were instructed to communicate when they would reopen (rather than if they were to remain closed) This was widely welcomed and praised by many Head teachers as an act of good leadership by the authority.
- Good feedback from Head teachers on the daily contact made with them by the Admissions & Transport Team, while their schools were closed, to share information and offer guidance. This was the first time that we had provided this service and it did rely on staff getting in early and sharing the workload
- Radio stations’ willingness to convey this change.
- Actions of Admissions and Transport staff and Blackfriars custodians to ensure Blackfriars was open and school closure/transport information coming in by telephone/email was being processed by 6.00 am to update Council web page and radio stations.

- Good communication links with transport providers to assess what transport could take place on which routes. This was then regularly communicated to schools.
- Participation in the daily Silver Group meetings to coordinate the public services response

#### **What did not go well**

- Reporting of school closures and openings was not consistent across all local radio stations
- BBC Radio Hereford & Worcester were reluctant to broadcast details specific to individual schools, such as reduced opening times, closure to certain year groups, need to bring packed lunches etc. This is understandable, given the volume of school closures that were taking place
- One radio station breached security procedures by accepting telephone calls from Head teachers without verification of password and 'pin'. The radio station corrected this as soon as they were notified
- In error, one radio station broadcast a school as closed, when no such communication had been made
- One City High school, having decided to open, then made decision to close at 9.00 am as the severe weather set in. Complaints that some parents, having gone to work believing school to be open, would not be aware (despite best efforts of school to alert all parents)
- Time-lag between information appearing on Herefordshire Council web site and radio stations' web sites varied

#### **Improvements to be made**

Children & Young People's Directorate is working with a company to develop an automated, web based, system that will allow secure access for school Head teachers (or their nominated substitutes) to inform by email the local authority, school transport contractors and radio stations of their school's closure and reopening in one action, by using the web, telephone or text. The action will also update Herefordshire Council's web site automatically, with the page being refreshed every 5 minutes. It is planned to have this system tested and in place for the new school year in September 2010.

A further development will be investigated to see whether a link could be created to enable this automated system to inform a schools' text messaging system for parents.

#### **Relevant policies in place**

Until the automated system is in place, the existing 'Emergency School Closure' procedure will continue to operate.

## **2. Services**

Most of the services provided by the Children and Young People's Directorate were affected by the snow in terms of staff being able to get to work. Cover arrangements were put in place for services based on the staff available which worked well.

The most important area was our Safeguarding and Vulnerable Children services. We operated a functional service through the whole period, with a fully operational

referral and assessment response service and statutory service provision throughout the period. Whilst many had to go the extra mile to cover colleagues work this was done positively and effectively, for example although we were low on numbers of workers people volunteered to do others visits to ensure children were seen and kept safe. Staff lists of workers available were collected and circulated on a daily basis to ensure the service could deploy staff effectively.

#### **What went well**

- High level of commitment from Social Work teams
- Staff made themselves available for duty and for scheduled visits
- Those with crypto cards could continue with their duties from their home base
- Management cover was available throughout

#### **What did not go well**

- We had to cancel a Children in Care Council
- Some statutory (long-term cases) visits were cancelled and rearranged, following appropriate risk assessments
- One visit to a child was delayed by a day where we urgently wished to do so
- Those without crypto cards could not catch up on computer work if they were not able to come into work and therefore our performance and timescales suffered

#### **Improvements to be made**

More mobile working opportunities for social workers which would have assisted in our meeting statutory timescales and not losing valuable working hours, and/or more local access points for workers to work closer to home where it may have been possible to walk to such facilities. This is being looked into by the service, along with the potential of social workers to use the locality hubs being developed around the county.

#### **Reflections – additional points to note**

The directorate has put in place senior staff contact lists across the directorate to enable a quick response to any future situations and our on call rotas have been updated. The preparations for swine flu had helped in many ways to prepare the directorate to respond to the adverse weather.

There was a high level of commitment and resilience shown by staff across the directorate and a number of staff worked long hours to ensure service cover. Staff were thanked for their efforts by the Lead Member and Director of Children's Services.

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