



**FOR PUBLICATION**

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**7 April 2022**

**Report of the Executive Director - Children's Services**

**Levelling-Up**

**1. Divisions Affected**

1.1 County-wide

**2. Key Decision**

2.1 This is a key decision because it is proposed expenditure above £500,000 likely to result in the Council incurring expenditure which are significant having regard to the budget for the service or function concerned and it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more electoral areas in the County.

**3. Purpose**

3.1 To seek Cabinet's approval a on the council's levelling up strategy focused on securing more young people within the county who are confident readers and to support schools in their approaches to building the essential life skills, emotional health and resilience in young people. This complements the government's 'Levelling Up White Paper' as announced in February 2022.

**4. Information and Analysis**

4.1 Derbyshire is an ambitious council which is committed to tackling the legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic on our young people and communities and ensuring that the county is well positioned to bounce back to full strength. We know that the pandemic has had a significant

impact on children and young people in many ways due to being isolated from their peers, restrictive attendance in education settings and the disruption to face to face learning and society in general. Never before has it been more important than today to support our great education providers to help secure positive pathways and transitions for the county's young people.

- 4.2 Nationally, the government has invested significant funding to help schools provide additional support for their children and young people via £1.8 billion into catch up, including for tutoring and teacher training opportunities. In addition, on 2 February 2022, the government launched their 'Levelling Up White Paper' where they announced plans for 55 new Education Investment Areas (EIAs) in parts of the country. Derbyshire is one of these areas and may benefit from government strategies such as support to improve attendance and recruitment and retention incentives for teachers. But Derbyshire County Council will go further. We intend to target investment, support and action to ensure children from all backgrounds and areas succeed at the very highest levels by recognising that many young people, whatever their background, gender or race do not, for a variety of reasons, have access to the opportunities of some of their peers. Therefore, the council has committed £1million for disadvantaged young people, whatever their background, race or gender to have the best educational and life-chance opportunities to excel and thrive alongside their more fortunate peers. This will be invested into supporting settings and schools to develop confident readers and also in supporting schools in developing the resilience and essential life skills in young people.
- 4.3 Derbyshire's educational outcomes in many areas surpass national results and place the county's young people in a strong position to make positive transitions in life. For example, in 2021, 51.2% of Derbyshire's students were assessed by their teachers as achieving a strong pass in both English and mathematics at age 16 compared to 48.4% nationally. At 'A' Level, state-funded students in Derbyshire have similar performance to state-funded students nationally. However, in 2021 the proportion of students achieving grades AAB or better in two facilitating subjects was significantly higher than the state-funded average. Compared to all local authorities in England, at 'A' Level Derbyshire is consistently ranked in the upper middle quartile for the percentage of students achieving 3+A\*-A grades or AAB or better and in two facilitating subjects.
- 4.4 Whilst education outcomes in many areas surpass national results, we recognise that the picture across the county is not consistent. Prior to the pandemic, outcomes in both phonics for seven-year-old children and also reading scores at age eleven years were not always as high as we wanted them to be. For example, in 2019, 80% of seven-year-

old children in Derbyshire achieved the government's phonics standard whereas this was 81.8% nationally and the phonics outcomes in our areas of highest disadvantage are not always yet where we want them to be.

- 4.5 In June 2021, 50% of schools (45 schools) in Bolsover and North East Derbyshire had over 25% of their young people who were eligible for free school meals and this rises to approximately 70% (33 schools) in Chesterfield. In 2019 78.2% of seven-year-olds achieved the phonics standard in Bolsover and North-East Derbyshire compared to 80% for all children in the county. We know that children and young people need be confident readers to access the school curriculum with ease and this is why we want to support our schools to tackle this important issue whether it be for early readers via phonics or reading for eleven-year-old children. This levelling up investment will provide settings and schools with programmes to enable them to support their children to become confident readers.
- 4.6 2019 is the last year where we have test outcomes for eleven-year-old children due to the COVID-19 suspension of national tests and in this year 56.8% of disadvantaged eleven-year-old children achieved the expected standard in reading in Bolsover and North-East Derbyshire compared to 58.4% of disadvantaged children across the whole county and 62.1% nationally. It is these longstanding issues of lower outcomes in areas of high disadvantage why we need to invest into phonics, reading programmes and in to developing the essential life skills of young people in the county and especially for disadvantaged children.
- 4.7 In June 2020, the National Literacy Trust reported that children's enjoyment of reading increased during the first lockdown (from 47.8% pre-lockdown to 55.9% post-lockdown). However, their research titled 'Children and young people's reading in 2020 before and during the COVID-19 lockdown' also commented that some children and young people reported that a lack of access to books (with schools and libraries closed), a lack of quiet space at home and a lack of school/peer support had negatively affected their ability to read and their motivation to read for enjoyment.
- 4.8 Schools and all education providers across Derbyshire have done a fabulous job to keep children and young people in learning throughout the pandemic. Schools remained open every day, even when restricted attendance was in force, but we know that the creation of a language rich environment via virtual learning platforms has been difficult, and this can impact on reluctant readers or those who may not have the resources to read at home. Reading and a rich language are the bedrocks of being able to access the school curriculum and this is exactly why we need to support schools in their efforts to create

more confident readers and to achieve this aim we will invest in the high-quality professional development for early years and primary phase staff in the teaching of phonics and reading. To achieve this, we will work with the government's education support architecture such as teaching schools and also with other organisations to promote and deliver programmes with early years and settings and schools to help young people become confident communicators and confident readers. Our levelling up fund will enable more schools to be involved in these programmes by meeting some of the costs. This is outlined in our plan in appendix 2.

- 4.9 As a county council, we also plan to support schools to build the resilience of young people following the pandemic and our levelling up strategy will enable the council's Sports and Outdoor Residential Services to offer more support to schools. In September 2021, the government's 'COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing surveillance: report' commented,

*'... Evidence suggests that some children and young people's mental health and wellbeing has been substantially impacted due to and during the pandemic...'* (Section 4)

- 4.10 We know schools and their activities are an essential component in helping young people become more resilient and this is why we are investing into activities which directly support children and young people and schools to bounce back from the pandemic, to help level up our areas and support the county's children and young people to become more resilient and make positive transitions in life. We will invest in developing resilience and the essential life skills in children and young people via innovative programmes around science, technology, engineering and mathematics, a programme focused on engaging young people called 'Moving on Moving up' and capturing the very best from the county's young people via a new 'Spirit of Derbyshire' award. By working with schools as partners, these exciting programmes will be delivered by our 'Sports and outdoor residential education services' (SORE) to help enhance resilience in young people. The programmes are directly in line with the council's priorities to develop resilient, thriving and green communities via high quality public services which work alongside our communities. These programmes are outlined in our plan in appendix 2.

- 4.11 Derbyshire County Council's investment into supporting the improvement in reading and helping to improve the mental health and resilience of young people are only two areas of our wider strategy. Levelling up is not the responsibility of one partner, no matter how critical education providers are to young people. As a council we also work with our strategic and regional partners, including the Local Enterprise Partnership, D2N2. The local enterprise partnership works

intensively with Derbyshire's schools including those in areas of disadvantage. For example, D2N2's careers hub has expanded into the High Peak, Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire in addition to operating in North-East Derbyshire and Bolsover. The expanded D2N2 Careers Hub comprises of 56 Derbyshire schools and colleges (152 regionally) which work together sharing resources, knowledge, and best practice. Each Careers Hub institution is supported by a strategic leader from business, who works with the school or college's senior leadership team to embed skills and employability as a part of the school/college's improvement plan. The Careers Hub also provides accredited training for a 'Careers Leader' in each school and college, which helps to ensure a strategic approach to careers education and support young people through into positive progression routes. Added to this have been the virtual careers events and platforms which young people can access such as, the 'My Future' platform which focuses on the Chesterfield area and aims to give young people across Chesterfield and North Derbyshire access to the widest range of high-quality careers advice, employment support, skills and educational programmes. Similarly, the Derbyshire South Virtual Careers Fair allows young people to explore possible future destinations. During the lockdown period these virtual platforms offered free support and transitions guidance (by trained professionals) to young people from some of the most disadvantaged communities in Derbyshire, and over 15,000 support requests were facilitated during this time.

- 4.12 In addition to help the resilience and secure positive futures for young people, the Careers Hubs have galvanised the support of local employers, with 146 businesses supporting their operations across the region. In Derbyshire a large group of 24 Cornerstone employers are acting as ambassadors, delivering targeted workshops and engagement activities to students from areas of high disadvantage, and to students who may face additional barriers. As an example, Fortem PLC have engaged their supply chains to support Netherthorpe School in Staveley, where 24% of learners are claiming free school meals and according to the index of multiple deprivation is in the top 10% of deprived areas in Derbyshire. Through the Careers Hub, Fortem PLC created employability programmes which have been rolled out to students across the school and have worked with the Careers Hub delivery teams to create a free to access work experience programme for all Year 10 learners.
- 4.13 During the COVID-19 pandemic, Derbyshire County Council has also developed, led and co-ordinated significant strategies to support families through the worst of the pandemic and support our levelling up agenda. We have delivered circa 9,100 digital devices to Derbyshire children's through DfE schemes and provided internet connectivity to 562 children and young people across Derbyshire

between June 2020 and October 2021. By working in partnership with districts councils, schools and community and voluntary agencies, we have maximised the impact of our Household Support Fund (HSF) grant funding of £5.4m to help support residents facing financial hardship over winter 21/22 to pay for food, energy and essential living costs. By the end of the HSF grant period, we estimate that:

- approximately 6,000 families will have received cash grants with an average payment of £124 for a family of four and each family will be able to access two payments within the period.
- 27,000 children eligible for benefit related free school meals will have received a £50 food voucher in early February 2022, and
- distributed £1.2m to district councils to support another 6,000 families with children with financial or practical housing related support.
- Provided £190,000 in HSF grants to community and voluntary sector organisations

4.14 Similarly, by utilising the government's £2.8m Holiday Activities and Food funding, we have established a network of 62 community and voluntary providers to deliver over 60,000 holiday activity and food places to vulnerable children eligible to free school meals over summer and Christmas. An additional 816 places were offered by our sports and outdoor education services.

4.15 Derbyshire County Council is fortunate to have an adult education service which also contributes to the levelling up agenda and can focus its resources on helping to remove barriers for some disadvantaged young people. Derbyshire Adult Community Education Service (DACES) facilitates weekly hubs for those preparing to leave care, in partnership with the Virtual School and Creative Mentors programme, at the Derbyshire Eco Centre, Hunloke and Alfreton Adult Community Education Centres. These are designed as stepping-stones into study programmes, work experience, internships, and apprenticeships. These young people are also able to access careers advice, wider support in developing independent living skills, employability, and strategies to optimise their well-being.

4.16 DACES was also an integral part of the Council's Internships for Care Leaver's project around the provision of essential numeracy, literacy and digital skills, procuring providers for supportive apprenticeships for care leavers and is currently working with colleagues in HR Services over the development of a specific traineeship for care leavers through work placements, skills development and enhanced qualifications.

4.17 In addition, DACES is the main delivery arm of the Council's flagship iStep-Up programme, developed in partnership with colleagues in

Economic Development and Early Help, which targets young people at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET) with bespoke, intensive employability and personal development programmes. This provides a range of integrated activities including careers advice, interview skills, projects, and work experience with local employers. The programme has previously delivered a bespoke programme for care leavers.

- 4.18 Derbyshire County Council's young people's levelling up strategy is focused on supporting those in greatest need to recover from the challenges of the pandemic. Our approach to support children to become more confident readers and improving the resilience in young people is core to our strategy which is supported by the complementary activity outlined within this report.

## **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 In summer 2021, Derbyshire County Council consulted with schools and early years providers about working together on common priorities across the county. As a result of this consultation, education providers have identified the need for young people to become confident readers, for young people to develop their essential life skills around issues such as resilience and to focus on the emotional health and well-being of young people.

## **6. Alternative Options Considered**

- 6.1 Option 1 - Rely solely on the government's school support architecture of teaching schools to provide support for phonics and reading and for schools to find this themselves. This was considered and rejected since some capacity issues can exist in the number of schools which can be supported by the teaching schools without expanding their capacity and not all schools can find the funding to access alternative schemes around phonics or reading. Hence this funding will enable learning providers to fund professional development for their staff in both reading and phonics and to purchase this from either teaching schools who will expand their capacity or from the local authority education improvement team.
- 6.2 Option 2 - Rely solely on schools to address the emotional and well-being issues for all young people by using their existing strategies. This was considered but rejected since we have strong local capacity via our sports and outdoor residential education services (SORE) which can support schools in their ventures and the funding will enable SORE to meet this need.
- 6.3 Option 3 - Rely solely on the government's Education Investment Areas as announced in the Levelling Up White Paper. This was considered but

rejected as the support for phonics, reading and building the resilience of young people will complement the strategies within the Education Investment Areas.

## **7. Implications**

7.1 Appendix 1 sets out the relevant implications considered in the preparation of the report.

## **8. Background Papers**

- 'Levelling up in the United Kingdom'. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. February 2022.
- 'COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing surveillance: report'. Office of Health Improvement and Disparities. September 2021.
- 'Children and young people's reading in 2020 before and during the COVID-19 lockdown'. National Literacy Trust, July 2020

## **9. Appendices**

9.1 Appendix 1 – Implications  
Appendix 2 – Levelling Up Plan

Appendix 3 – Equalities Impact Assessment

## **10. Recommendation(s)**

- a) That Cabinet considers the council's levelling strategy to support young people within the county to become more confident readers and to support schools in their approaches to building the essential life skills and resilience in young people by approving Children Services to work with early years providers and schools in the development of phonics and reading programmes in their efforts to develop confident readers.
- b) Support the development of programmes via the council's Sports and Outdoor Residential Education Services to develop and operate programmes to improve the essential life skills and emotional health in young people.
- c) to consider and to approve the plan in Appendix 2.
- d) To request £1m funding from General Reserve being held in an earmarked education levelling up reserve to fund the programmes across financial years 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 and to delegate the allocation of the funding to the Executive Director of Children's Services and the council's Director of Finance.



- e) To note the wider strategies which the council is leading or promoting to aid levelling up for the county's young people specially with regards to strategies such as the Holiday and Food Funding, careers work and the work of DACES.

## **11. Reasons for Recommendation(s)**

- 11.1 To support children and young people, and especially the most disadvantaged, to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and to help level up the county.
- 11.2 To support schools and early years providers, especially in those areas of high disadvantage, for their children and young people to become more confident readers to be able to access the school curriculum.
- 11.3 To support schools, and especially those in areas of high disadvantage, for their children to develop the essential life skills needed to make positive transitions in life.
- 11.4 To complement the government's 'Levelling Up White Paper' especially with regards to Education Investment Areas as announced in the government's Levelling Up White Paper.

## **12. Is it necessary to waive the call-in period?**

- 12.1 No

Report Author: Iain Peel

Contact details: [iain.peel@derbyshire.gov.uk](mailto:iain.peel@derbyshire.gov.uk)

## **Implications**

### **Financial**

- 1.1 The levelling up strategy as outlined within this will be financed through the Council's Levelling Up Fund for children and young people. An allocation from general reserve will be required to create this fund. The strategy will be delivered through working with the government's education support architecture such as teaching schools and other organisations and by utilising existing services such as Derbyshire's Sports and Outdoor Residential Education Services. There will be no ongoing commitments or liabilities falling to council budgets after the programmes have concluded.

### **Legal**

- 2.1 The Council is exercising its powers under Section 13(A) of the Education Act 1996 to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community by securing that efficient primary education, and secondary education are available to meet the needs of the population of their area. In addition, pursuant to Section 1 of the Childcare Act 2006 the Council has a duty improve the well-being of young children in their area and reduce the inequalities between young children. The powers and duty conferred to the Council by these Acts will assist the Council to further the objectives as set in the government's plan 'Levelling up in the United Kingdom' (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. February 2022)

### **Human Resources**

- 3.1 There are no human resources considerations. The funding will allow schools to work with organisations such as teaching schools, Specialist Leaders in Education or meet some council costs such as outdoor education instructors. There are no costs falling to council budgets after the programmes have concluded.

### **Information Technology**

- 4.1 There are no IT considerations.

### **Equalities Impact**

- 5.1 Development of the council's levelling up strategy focused on securing more young people within the county who are confident readers and to support schools in their approaches to building the essential life skills

and resilience in young people. This complements the government's 'Levelling Up White Paper' as announced in February 2022. The attached equalities impact assessment demonstrates that the work is intended to help schools in their efforts to develop confident readers and more resilient children especially those with high levels of disadvantage.

### **Corporate objectives and priorities for change**

- 6.1 Resilient, healthy and safe communities. Supporting education providers to develop more confident readers and the essential life skills in young people helps to strengthen communities, make young people ready to make positive transitions in life and to be emotionally healthy.
- 6.2 High performing, value for money and resident focused services. Education providers developing more confident readers and developing the essential life skills in young people helps to provide good quality education provision to Derbyshire's communities.
- 6.3 A prosperous and green Derbyshire. Utilising the open space of Derbyshire by our Sports and Outdoor Residential Education Services helps young people to appreciate the resources around them. Similarly, the work around developing more confident readers and developing essential; life skills enable young people to make positive transitions in life and into the work of work.