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**Chair for the Education, Young People & Families
Policy Committee
Councillor for Shiregreen and Brightside Ward
Town Hall, Sheffield, S1 2HH**

Dear Annie,

Further to my answer I gave at Full Council I want to say clearly that I share your significant concerns, and the concerns of many people in this city, about the heartbreaking situation in Gaza.

The news that is being reported from Gaza is devastating and the humanitarian crisis is growing in severity.

I fully agree with the Leader's comments when he says that the urgent provisional measures set out in the ICJ's interim ruling must be followed. Israel must comply with the orders in full and international law must be upheld.

I agree with you that what children are seeing on the news and on social media feeds is traumatic and deeply distressing. I feel strongly that children need safe spaces to discuss their concerns and fears, so that they can contextualise and make sense of what they are seeing.

They should not be expected to navigate their feelings about this conflict on their own.

We have been proactive in our options to support our Young Residents in the City. Discussions have been had to develop and advocate different opportunities for young people to participate in. We have recognised that we need to respond to three emerging issues for young people and the youth sector:

- Young people being able to express their authentic self with creative youth voice opportunities.
- Working with young people to help understand the conflict in all contexts and consider their own social and emotional responses to this.
- We want our workforce to be safe, well and enabled to work with the experiences of young people that are related to this conflict.

Regarding our schools I would encourage any young person or parent with concerns to raise them directly with schools and their governing bodies.

The national curriculum, mandated by the Department for Education, outlines guidelines for all maintained schools, with many academy trust schools opting to follow suit. Citizenship education is compulsory in secondary schools, forming a non-statutory framework in primary schools.

The detailed programme of study for citizenship is available on the DfE website, with schools often adapting content based on community needs. While local authorities cannot dictate the programme's content, we offer support if sought. Presently, schools adhere to DfE guidance on political impartiality while promoting debate and discussion within the wider curriculum.

1. Recognising the importance of reliable information sources in understanding complex narratives, many Sheffield schools utilise such sources and strive for accreditation under UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools programme.
2. The council agrees on the necessity of safe spaces for children to express their views, fostering knowledge, compassion, acceptance, tolerance, and understanding, often found within schools.
3. Acknowledging the age restrictions on social media platforms, the council recognises the challenges in monitoring children's online activity. Encouraging a team approach involving parents, carers, and teachers, it advocates for creating safe spaces for discussions on media coverage.
4. The council emphasises various mechanisms for parents or carers to voice concerns and encourages open communication with schools, each having policies for addressing challenging issues.

Following discussions at Full Council on the Israel – Palestine Conflict, our youth service has been proactive in our options to support our Young Residents in the City. This has been an immediate partnership with our voluntary community youth organisations and those with expertise of young resident's experiences in the city. A number of discussions have been had to develop and advocate different opportunities for young people to participate in. As mentioned, we have been working with partners and have recognised that we need to respond to three emerging issues for young people and the youth sector:

- Young people being able to express their authentic self with creative youth voice opportunities. – We will be working with close partners and our city council Youth Voice and Influence Service to use film to produce a piece of work that empowers young people to express their thoughts, feelings and views.
- We have been working closely with VCSF Community Partners, who are currently producing resources to work with young people to help understand the conflict in all contexts and enables young people to consider their own social and emotional responses to this. We have also been able to make a commitment to open dialogue with schools to look at supporting additional resources around the conflict that can open safe spaces up for young people in schools to have a voice. This is in the very early stages, and we are awaiting resources from partners which will be fact checked before we approach schools.
- Finally, we want our workforce to be safe, well and enabled to work with the experiences of young people that are related to this conflict and we have partners willing to offer Mental Health First Aid for practitioners working in communities with young people to be able to process their own social and emotional responses linked to this and their work.

I will be writing to all schools in Sheffield with a copy of my response so that my views on this matter are understood.

Many thanks again for bringing your question to Council.

Kind regards,

Councillor Dawn Dale

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