

The Highland Council

Adult and Children's Services Committee

Minutes of Meeting of the **Culture and Leisure Contracts Scrutiny Sub-Committee** held in Committee Room 1, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 30 January 2014 at 2.00pm.

Present:

Mr A Christie

Mr G MacKenzie

Mr B Fernie (Tele Conferencing)

Mr G Ross

Mr M Greene

In attendance:

Mr J Macdonald, Learning and Leisure Client Manager, Education, Culture and Sport Service

Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Service

Also in attendance:

Mr D Wilby, Head of Performance, High Life Highland

Ms A Taylor, Highland Youth Convener

Ms C McArthur, Acting Principal Libraries Officer, High Life Highland

Mr A Christie in the Chair.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs I Campbell, Mr B Gormley, Mr E Hunter, Mrs B McAllister, Mr M Rattray and Ms J Slater.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Highland Youth Convener

Ms Ainya Taylor, Highland Youth Convener, gave a presentation on her role and some of the main topics she was engaged with on behalf of young people in Highland.

During her presentation Ms Taylor focused on her Action Plan for 2013-2014, copies of which she circulated to the Sub-Committee. She advised that the priorities set out in the Action Plan were to:

- get involved in the promotion of voting, increasing young people's interest and awareness of voting and to encourage debate amongst young people in Highland about the forthcoming referendum;
- educate young people on their rights within employment and the support that was available and to inform those looking for employment of the contacts, skills and experience which could be helpful;

- explore issues relating to health for young people, particularly in regard to mental health and the issues surrounding underage drink/drugs misuse;
- raise issues over transport provision in Highland and the reliability/cost of public transport for young people; and
- promote the role of Youth Convener, Highland Youth Voice (HYV), Scottish Youth Parliament and local youth forums and groups.

In regard to the above priorities Ms Taylor outlined the range of initiatives and activities which were ongoing under each of the headings. She also responded to a number of questions from Members in the course of which she indicated that:

- in regard to the theme around 'Transport' a Transport Focus Group had been established and that it was due to report on its observations following its first meeting in February 2014. Key issues would be around school transport policy and bus passes for young people;
- she would respond directly to Mr M Greene on the best way to engage with young people at Nairn Academy to ensure their participation in the forthcoming Nairn Charrette. She suggested that this may be best achieved in school time through the Nairn Youth Forum and by an on-line questionnaire, for example Survey Monkey;
- in regard to the theme around 'Health', Highland Youth Voice had close links with NHS Highland in regard to consultations and activities linked to young people. HYV was also working with NHS Highland to develop a peer education system within schools and had also established a Health and Wellbeing Group; and
- she would arrange for an electronic copy of her presentation to be circulated to Members of the Sub-Committee.

Thereafter, the Chair thanked Ms Taylor for her presentation.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

4. Highland Library Service – Bookbug Scheme

Ms Charlotte McArthur, Acting Principal Libraries Officer, High Life Highland, gave a presentation on the aims of the Bookbug Scheme and how it engaged with customers of the Library Service. She advised that the Scheme was funded by the Scottish Government and administered by the Scottish Book Trust.

Ms McArthur reported on evidence which showed that the brain developed more quickly from birth to age three than at any other stage. She explained that the Highland Early Years Collaborative had stated the evidence suggested that between a fifth and a third of children did not have the developmental skills and abilities expected of them at age two and a half, and that the figures were similar for children starting school.

The Bookbug Scheme therefore supported the evidence that singing, talking or reading to a very young child causes a reaction in the infant which then triggered a response from the adult. These positive interactions help build the foundation for future learning and teach children to have positive emotional connections with other people through their adult lives.

Ms McArthur confirmed that Bookbug sessions were offered in every library in Highland and that in 2013, library staff delivered over 1500 sessions which were attended by 10,000 children and 7,000 parents. In addition library staff delivered over 100 outreach sessions at nurseries, community events, festivals etc. She explained that Bookbug provided gift book packs for children at four stages between birth and five years. A Gaelic version of each pack was available, and packs also included books written in the Scots language.

Ms McArthur also provided an outline of Bookbug Assertive Outreach which supported families to talk, read, sing and play together; encouraged parents and carers to take advantage of local authority Early Years programmes, including attendance at public Bookbug sessions; and to ensure that Bookbug was accessible to all.

Following her presentation and in response to questions from Members, Ms McArthur advised the Scheme sought to do as much outreach work as possible but that this was dependant on staff availability and location. She advised that work was ongoing to train other workers to deliver the Bookbug Scheme e.g. nursery staff, and that this would extend the capacity to deliver outreach work.

In discussion Members expressed their full support for the Scheme and the positive outcomes it delivered for children. There was also a comment that the Scheme had helped some parents with literacy issues to improve their reading skills.

Discussion followed on the opportunities to train staff and volunteers to increase the provision of outreach work, particularly in the context of the additional child care provision being made available by the Scottish Government.

Ms McArthur advised that the Scottish Book Trust was to develop additional training sessions in this regard. High Life Highland also had a programme whereby staff involved in delivering the Scheme would receive training to train other members of staff. Therefore a combination of the above would deliver more training opportunities and increase the capacity for additional outreach work in Highland.

In response to a further point raised Ms McArthur advised it was part of High Life Highland's operational plan to undertake more Bookbug related work in prisons and work was ongoing with HM Prison, Inverness in this regard.

Thereafter, the Chair thanked Ms McArthur for her presentation.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

5. High Life Highland Progress Report

There had been circulated Report No CLCS/01/14 dated 21 January 2104 by the Director of Education, Culture and Sport which presented information on the performance of High Life Highland during the operating period July 2013 to December 2013.

In summary, it was noted that High Life Highland had met or exceeded the outcomes expected in the Service Delivery Contract with the Council for the period July 2013 to December 2013. In this regard the quarterly performance indicators which monitored progress were set out in Appendix 1 of the report. The report also advised that the

performance of High Life Highland against annual performance indicators/actions would be reported to a future meeting. An update was also provided on recent/current activity under a range of headings.

Arising from the report the Head of Performance reported that the Chief Executive of High Life Highland had made a presentation to the Scottish Government Working Group on Sport, chaired by the Mr H McLeish, the former First Minister, on the low cost High Life access scheme which sought to ensure that those on low incomes and benefits could access leisure and sports facilities. He indicated that the Group had welcomed the High Life scheme as an innovative approach to allow those on low incomes to access facilities and there were indications that this approach may be adopted across Scotland.

The Head of Performance also referred to the Creative Learning Programme and in this regard circulated copies of a book: 'Cows Have Passports - Story Sharing Across the Generations' which was a collection of short stories from an inter-generational project in which school pupils had participated.

In connection with the Report, the Chair noted that High Life Highland had met or exceeded the outcomes expected in the Contract. However he requested that in future reports further detail be provided in regard to exactly what the outcomes were under each of the actions/performance indicators listed in the report to assist with Members in their scrutiny role. He also suggested that the opportunity be taken to revisit the outcomes on each of the actions/performance indicators to consider whether the targets required to be reviewed or whether there were any areas that could be developed further.

Members also requested that additional information be provided on whether actions were ongoing or had been completed.

The Learning and Leisure Client Manager confirmed that arrangements would be made to provide further detail and commentary in future reports on the basis requested.

The Head of Performance explained that High Life Highland had developed operational plans which set out clear improvement objectives. The High Life Highland Board reviewed these operational plans on a quarterly basis and re-set them annually. He confirmed that he would liaise with the Learning and Leisure Client Manager in regard to the level of detail provided in future reports.

In response to a question the Head of Performance explained that High Life was available when the organisation had full responsibility for running facilities. However in the case of facilities where High Life Highland staff were assisting management committees to run activities the scheme was not operated. The Chair requested that the Head of Performance advise Members on the opportunities to review the pricing of activities in such circumstances to assist those on low incomes.

A point was also raised in regard to staffing levels and budgets and the Sub Committee's role in these matters. The Chair confirmed that he would check with the relevant officials whether the scrutiny of staffing and budgets was carried out through the Council's representatives on the High Life Highland Board or whether the Sub Committee had a role in this regard, and report back to Members on this matter.

Thereafter, the Sub-Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that High Life Highland had met or exceeded the outcomes expected in the Service Delivery Contract with the Council for the period July 2013 to December 2013; and
- ii. **AGREED** that future reports provide more detail on the outcomes expected in the Service Delivery Contract and whether actions were completed or ongoing, to allow the Sub-Committee to consider whether targets required to be reviewed and/or if there were any new areas that could be developed.

The meeting concluded at 2.45pm.