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| Agenda Item | 10. |
| Report No | CLH 78/19 |

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Care, Learning and Housing

Date: 5 December 2019

Report Title: Reviewing the Curriculum to Improve Outcomes for All

Report By: Chief Executive

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the need for a review of education's curriculum provision within Highland Council. At present, national debate is ongoing over the need to explore the various approaches taken to building the curriculum, how national guidance has been interpreted and how successfully it has been implemented. Recent press speculation on supposed falling levels of attainment have seen a robust response from Marina Shapira et al, in **Curriculum for Excellence and attainment in National Qualifications** (November 2019), which refutes the idea of falling attainment and instead calls for more comprehensive measures to enable fairer scrutiny of the success of Curriculum for Excellence. The paper raises the issue of curriculum provision, senior phase planning and the introduction of new courses which carry equitable tariff points to traditional SQA courses. The paper highlights the need for curriculum planning to be calculated to raise attainment, and coherent in order for all stakeholders to understand the curricular offer and its various merits. Further to this, in September 2019, the Scottish Government announced that they would be undertaking a national review of the curriculum, with a report due to be published in 2020.
- 1.2 It is clear that Highland Council's education Directorate needs to prepare and map a strategic plan in response to the findings of the Scottish Government's report by considering:
- interpretation of the recommendations;
 - how scrutiny of the current curriculum provision across the Highlands will take place in response to this;
 - outline the support and challenge for schools undertaking curriculum reviews in 2020 and beyond

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to agree that:

- i. A Highland Council review of curriculum provision takes place in response to the findings and recommendations of the national curriculum review currently underway by the Scottish Government.
- ii. Schools should use innovation and creativity to design a curriculum suited to their individual context, giving the autonomy to decide locally on number of qualifications offered to given year groups, including taking account of the distinct nature and needs of the culture, heritage and economy of the Highlands
- iii. Curriculum rationales should reflect the right to inclusion, with scope for individual pathway planning.
- iv. Schools and the local authority should maximise the opportunities for achievement through effective collaboration and partnership working.
- v. Good practice visits locally, nationally and internationally will strengthen the work in curriculum review and planning, providing scaffolding for construction of new curriculums to close the attainment gap and improve outcomes for all.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

Current resources within Education will be allocated and prioritised to support the Curriculum Review. Findings of the Review may have an impact upon the allocation of existing resource in future financial years.

3.2 Legal – None.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)

The Curriculum Review will consider community implications in the support and development of future curricular models across Highland secondary schools and links with partners supporting curriculum delivery.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever- None

3.5 Risk

Curricular models at individual school level must ensure that pupil attainment, achievement and inclusion are key principles of success for all groups of learners.

3.6 Gaelic

The Council will work with a range of partners to ensure that the aspirations of the Council's Gaelic Language Plan 3 are considered as per section 9 of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. The expansion of Gaelic Medium subject provision within the curriculum will be a key area for exploration again in consultation with a full range of partners including Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

4. Introduction

4.1 Scotland's curriculum places learners at the heart of education. At its centre are four fundamental capacities. These capacities reflect and recognise the lifelong nature of education and learning. They:

- recognise the need for all children and young people to know themselves as individuals and to develop their relationships with others, in families and in communities
- recognise the knowledge, skills and attributes that children and young people need to acquire to thrive in our interconnected, digital and rapidly changing world
- enable children and young people to be democratic citizens and active shapers of that world

- 4.2 The Highland Council has previously set out an ambitious plan for restructuring the management of education to raise standards, improving outcomes for all. When the new structure is in place, the next item on the improvement agenda must be a review of the curriculum provision within Highland. Through a curriculum which meets the needs of all learners, attainment can be raised. As debate takes place nationally, it is important that Highland looks inwards, outwards and forwards to determine the best practice in curriculum review and planning. Work on this is already underway, with the Change Team already consulting Head Teachers in collaboration with an Education Scotland representative. The planned restructure will put in place the right balance of support and challenge to deliver on the professional requirements for curriculum design, outlined as:
- Committing to career-long professional learning based around high quality, rigorous professional standards
 - Committing to meaningful professional review and development
 - Belonging to communities of practice and enquiry
 - Developing collaborative practice locally, nationally and globally
- 4.3 Highland Council shares the Scottish Government's ambitions for all our young people expressed in the Learner Journey Review, and has been working with Inverness College UHI, North Highland College UHI, West Highland College UHI and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to enhance the senior phase experience for our young people. Collectively, partners believe that the plan laid out in the Highland Senior Phase Strategy paper will enhance senior phase planning and curriculum review and development.

5. National Documentation

- 5.1 Several national documents have been published to assist curriculum review and development. Published in 2008, Building the Curriculum 3 (BtC3) provides a rationale for the departure from traditional curriculum structures, and offers a framework for practitioners to consult when undertaking redesign. It defines the curriculum as the totality of planned learning experienced across the four contexts of learning. This includes the ethos and life of the school, curriculum areas and subjects, interdisciplinary learning and opportunities for personal achievement. School leaders have excellent knowledge of the document, having worked with it for years. The entitlements outlined on BtC3 state that:
- The curriculum should be coherent from 3-18
 - Take account of a Broad General Education and a Senior Phase
 - Provide opportunities for developing skills for life, learning and work
 - Have a continuing focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing
 - Support young people moving into positive and sustained destinations

National advice on Gaelic Medium Education, published by Education Scotland in June 2019; Improving Practice: Developing a Gaelic Medium Curriculum and Advice on Gaelic Education – Gaelic Medium Education; Secondary stages is also available to assist with the process and to support senior leaders to improve the curriculum for Gaelic Medium and Gaelic Learners students.

- 5.2 Further to this, subsequent publications have developed the concept of a curriculum with enough flexibility to meet the needs for all. Creativity Across Learning, published by Education Scotland in September 2013, gives case studies of how creativity can be built into the curriculum. Not only does it advocate the development of learners' creative

flair, but also that of practitioners. When it comes to curriculum design, a creative approach is essential to ensure provision flexibility to meet entitlements.

- 5.3 With the national guidance in place, and a plethora of supporting documentation from wider sources, schools are well placed to engage with and provide feedback to an authority led review, undertake as well as the task of their own curricular reviews. A most recent publication is that of the 'Refreshed Narrative' on Scotland's curriculum. The refresh is a resource to engage practitioners and stakeholders in professional dialogue in curriculum design and inspire, share and nurture innovation. The strategic plan outlined includes National Conversations entitled 'Curriculum Matters', giving the opportunity to discuss ideas, share problems and seek solutions to enable the co-design of a 21st century curriculum. One such national conversation will be held in Inverness, November 2019. As a host to the discussion, Highland Council is well placed to contribute to the debate and lead in innovative approaches to curriculum review and design.

6. Skills Development

- 6.1 Moving forward, the current school of thought on curriculum design is that a successful curriculum should be underpinned by skills development, instead of curricular areas. The OECD 2030 paper highlights the need for social and metacognitive skills to be built into educational provision. Development of these skills will raise a generation of young people resilient enough for the challenges they will face on a global, national, local and personal scale. Technological advances are gathering pace all the time. Schools have a duty to prepare students for jobs which have not even been invented yet. Therefore, a skills based curriculum is the approach which will equip young people for the unknown challenges ahead.
- 6.2 In support of this rationale, Skills Development Scotland has produced the guidance document, Skills 4.0. This outlines a range of skills and subskills which will enhance the learning of our children and young people, whilst ensuring they marry up with the skills gap in local, national and international industries. The overarching skills are Self-Management, Social Intelligence and Innovation. This document has already been utilised by working groups within the authority, assisting the design of skills frameworks which meet the needs of students as well as those of local and national employers. Schools must now look to underpin curriculum development with the essential skills they have identified, marry these to curricular areas whilst considering the growth sectors in their local context. Curriculum rationales should promote skills development, and enable practitioners to adapt practice in learning and teaching to deliver on this agenda.

7. Using Curriculum Flexibility to Raise Attainment

- 7.1 Education Scotland, promotes curriculum flexibility to close the attainment gap. A thorough knowledge of the social context of the school is required to create and action plans to meet the needs of all. Various workshops have been delivered sharing advice on how to achieve this, and current SAC and PEF plans have enabled schools to adopt a tailored approach to pathway planning and curriculum provision.
- 7.2 Developing the Young Workforce is a key component to consider when designing flexible school curriculums. The Career Education Standard (CES) denotes the importance of linking current learning to future working, making the purpose of learning explicit to children and young people. The recommendation is that schools build career planning into their curriculum delivery, including workplace visits and experiences, to

make greater links between the knowledge and skills being developed within school settings, and ensure transferrable skills into the workplace. SDS service agreements with schools outline the support on offer to help schools deliver the career education standard for all students.

- 7.3 Business Partnership models are already underway within the authority. The recent work of Alness Academy is a local example of curriculum planning for opportunities for all. Initially the school undertook a curriculum review in December 2018, working in partnership with staff at all levels, Northern Alliance partners and students within the school. From this, a rationale was created and used to develop the curriculum offer in Senior Phase to offer more lateral progressions and recognise achievement through alternative courses and qualifications. Subsequent SAC funding has been utilised in Alness Academy to launch the Firth Project, building 3 tailored 'Academies' which provide support for the different pathways students will be on. A Workforce Academy has been established, where 6 businesses have joined the academy with a further 6 making links at present. The purpose of the academy is to build reciprocal partnerships, where businesses offer workplace visits, experiences and apprenticeships (foundation and modern) to Alness students. There is also a plan to share professional learning between leaders of the businesses and staff within Alness Academy. The Workforce Academy aims to enhance employment and training prospects for students, ensure they are career ready with transferrable skills and further qualifications, whilst developing a system for Staff Career Long Professional Learning. The SAC plans also include a Sports Academy which is now established in school, targeted at students showing developed ability within sport, enhancing their skills further to give a platform for competing at national level whilst encouraging keener engagement across other curricular areas and raising attainment in literacy and numeracy. The final branch of the academy works in partnership with Aspire North who work to support young people with academic ambition access Higher Education opportunities. Engagement commences from S3, with cohorts identified and reviewed each subsequent year. Aspire works closely with these students over the course of the 3-4 years, and assists in the development of independent study skills, motivation and aspiration and supports the application and interview process to college and university. The Alness SAC Academies were presented to the Depute First Minister during his recent visit to Highland Council, and were received with great enthusiasm. This is an example of leading good practice within the Highlands and demonstrates that building a curriculum with innovation and student needs at its core is achievable in any school context.
- 7.4 The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) partnership offers support to schools and other educational institutes to provide flexible approaches to curriculum delivery, ensuring national priorities are met whilst providing equal opportunities and meeting entitlements of all. The framework gives parity of qualifications offered by different organisations, allowing establishments to promote a culture of ambition and success through a broadening of curriculum offer and pathway planning to formally recognise achievements at all levels. Several schools have signed up to work in partnership with the SCQF and run the SCQF Ambassador programme.
- 7.5 'Amazing Things' is a document which outlines the variety of other accredited course which can be run by Youth Development staff. By including youth work colleagues in designing a curriculum and working together to deliver it, learners are offered a wider range of courses to suit individual pathway planning. Effective partnership working will be key across Highland, in particular for smaller schools who may find challenges in staffing a wider array of courses.

- 7.6 At an international level, there are many examples of innovative practice when designing curriculums. Lucy Crehan's study, 'Cleverlands', documents her travel around the globe to investigate countries with the highest educational success rates according to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). From Finland to Japan, Crehan recounts the merits of successful systems, delving into the social, political and historical contexts which have produced excellence in education. Through encouraging and supporting staff to look outwards for inspiration and motivation to succeed, curriculum redesign in Highland can be sector leading.
- 7.7 Further to this, Metro Nashville Public Schools (USA) have had global recognition for the work undertaken in achieving quality business partnerships to supplement and support the curriculum, and produce work ready students. Aberdeenshire Council have recently sent delegates to visit the leaders of the programme, and it is suggested that Highland Council looks to send a team of staff to seek out the good practice and deliver a strategic plan with similar aims but tailored the highland context.

8. Highland Curriculum at Present - Where Are We Now?

- 8.1 Education Scotland held a curriculum discussion day in Highland, looking at the refreshed CfE narrative. Head Teachers provided feedback stating it was useful for reflection, thinking time and re-visit to values and focus on CfE. There is a clear appetite amongst HTs for the 'space to lead' and to embrace opportunities for change. The four capacities were discussed, as was the need to identify and visit areas of good practice.
- 8.2 Through discussions, it is clear there is a strong focus on S3 at present, and ensuring the BGE dovetails to the Senior Phase, recognising the importance of smooth transitions and continuity of the curriculum.
- 8.3 Some schools feel they are on the right track with curriculum design, but this is not consistent across all schools. Head Teachers also requested clarity on the national model and number of qualification presentations for a candidate. Many schools have expanded their lateral progressions by introducing SCQF accredited courses, allowing for appropriate pathway planning for learners of all abilities. The request to maintain the virtual school to compliment school offers was also made.
- 8.4 The Highland Senior Phase strategy paper was noted by Education Scotland as one of the best examples seen, and this has now been shared with all Head Teachers. Education Scotland suggested the Council consider what has been learned from SAC/PEF interventions, Insight training, NIF, DYW and link this to the CfE refreshed narrative to inform practice and improve the process of curriculum review and design. To assist this, a suite of support documents have been added to a shared drive for Head Teachers to utilise when leading discussions and activities on curriculum redesign. A suite of ASN support materials for delivering alternative curriculums is also established, with links to Northern Ireland (Quest and Q Skills).
- 8.5 When looking at recent inspection reports, it was noted that they are reflecting creative curriculum pathways. However, the view was put forward that if attainment is good, the curriculum does not seem to feature as much in the SIFs. This would suggest that a sound curriculum will enhance attainment, therefore demonstrates the necessity for a Highland wide curriculum review and a support and challenge strategy to be outlined for schools to enhance their curriculum provision where necessary.

9. Gaelic Hub

- 9.1 To support the development of Gaelic Medium education in receiving Secondary Schools, the Council will undertake a review of Gaelic Medium education, with a view to develop the provision of an enhanced Gaelic Medium curriculum, in a recognised Centre of Excellence. The model could support the improvement of provision across other associated Secondary Schools and indeed would be seen as sector leading, across Scotland.
This work would be supported through collaborated working with external partners, including initial teacher training providers.

10. Challenges to Curriculum Provision in Highland Council

- 10.1 Discussion has taken place with Head Teachers around comparable staffing ratios /teaching commitment time in Highland compared to other Authorities. There is a greater impact on smaller schools where a drop in school roll could mean a specific subject drops from the timetable as they are single teacher departments in many cases. Recruitment issues remain a challenges, e.g. 0.2 FTE /part time posts are difficult to recruit and, more so, in rural areas.
- 10.2 Head Teachers also fed back that SQA courses are not aligned to enable flexibility e.g. Nat 4 and Nat 5 content does not marry up, yet may need to be taught in the same class. Bi and tri level teaching can be a strain on teaching staff. In addition statistics show that the uptake of SQA examinations, through the medium of Gaelic, is modest with the suggestion that this is related to the limited exposure to Gaelic language, in the BGE phase.
- 10.3 There is a need for a Highland strategy for the Broad General Education and open discussion on the Senior Phase strategy paper.
- 10.4 There is also a need to enable Head Teachers to be supported with their curriculum planning, sharing and support around IT/creative solutions.
- 10.5 There is a need to look at curriculum rationales and ensure these are updated and reflect model/pathways. These should be user friendly documents, delivering a concise and relatable message.
- 10.6 The concept of an entitlement for a Highland pupil will be explored as part of the Review.

11. Next Steps - Where Do We Want To Be and How Are We Going To Get There?

- 11.1 Significant work will now be prioritised across key central education staff and school leaders to build upon the initial work that has taken place in 2019 as noted below:

Feedback from engagement sessions with Headteachers in 2019

- Virtual school to remain and develop
- 33 period week to continue to be evaluated
- Facilitate further review and discussion on senior phase presentation policy
- Facilitate good practice visits, nationally and internationally
- Network support for timetablers/SQA
- Collaboration with Inverness College UHI, North Highland College UHI, West Highland College UHI and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to design equitable Senior Phase provision

- Seemis/IT support
- Subject networks to support Principal Teachers and Future Principal Teachers
- Highland Council to develop policy and guidance on guiding principles for the Broad General Education and the Senior Phase including tracking, monitoring and reporting.
- Sharing of course planning formats and courses across schools
- Timetabling support
- Develop and assess staffing formulas
- Use of Insight to support school data analysis, to help target areas for school improvement and curriculum development
- Draft plans for consortia arrangements to share teaching staff and resources amongst schools.

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 26 November 2019

Author: Nicky Grant, Interim Head of Education

Background Papers: