

Agenda Item	7.
Report No	EDU/22/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Education

Date: 18 November 2020

Report Title: Additional Support Needs Transformation Update

Report By: Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the work undertaken in Additional Support Needs (ASN) transformation since February 2020 and proposed next steps.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- (i) note the work undertaken thus far in the ASN Improvement Plan;
- (ii) agree the proposal for extensive member and stakeholder engagement; and
- (iii) agree that options will be brought back to the Education Committee for Member consideration and approval early in the new year.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource – No implications are anticipated as a result of this report. Full analysis will be provided of the costs associated with different allocation models as part of the options appraisal approach that will be presented to Members in the course of the engagement programme to support an informed decision on a preferred approach early in the new year.

3.2 Legal - No implications are anticipated as a result of this report. Any and all models presented for consideration will ensure the Council's capability to discharge its legal obligations.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) - No implications are anticipated as a result of this report. However, community implications will be a significant consideration in the assessment of the proposed models.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever - No implications are anticipated as a result of this report.

- 3.5 Risk - No implications are anticipated as a result of this report.
- 3.6 Gaelic – Whilst there are no implications anticipated as a result of this report, the provision of ASN support for Gaelic medium and Gaelic language learners is essential. Consideration of this will be included in the identification of key stakeholders which in turn will influence the engagement process. The impact on Gaelic will be factored into, and made apparent, when draft options are presented in due course.

4. Overview

- 4.1 At the Education Committee on 27 February 2020, an interim report and presentation was shared with Members. This outlined the findings of the ASN consultation held with key stakeholders across Highland’s learning communities. A number of action points were generated from the consultation, and since then, a number of these have been undertaken. Undoubtedly, Covid-19 has had an impact on the timescales the members of the Inclusion workstream have been working to, and so a revised timeline has been included in this report. More recently, the Scottish Government published the Additional Support for Learning Action Plan and, in light of this, actions have been updated to bring Highland in line with national recommendations whilst shaping the future of ASN to our Local Authority context.

5. Progress to Date

5.1 Review of Allocation Model

- 5.1.1 It was agreed that the allocation model was not delivering improved outcomes and so did not represent value for money. In response to this, a working group was established to review the needs of Highland and the alternative models which are performing better in other local authorities.
- 5.1.2 Phase 1 has consequently involved extensive information gathering, external visits and scrutiny of data to assist in the development of a range of potential models for consideration. This enhanced knowledge and understanding of the ASN allocation process will assist stakeholders to make informed observations and preferences, to inform the final decision on the model best placed to suit the Highland context. The key elements in deciding the quantum of resource allocated to a school or ASG across Scotland are roll, deprivation (FME, SIMD & Social Economic Index) and assessment of pupils’ levels of needs. Stakeholder views will be sought on these elements as well as consideration of the process after the quantum is allocated i.e. who then carries out the prioritisation of allocating the resource to individual schools. There are other factors for consideration within the Highland context: rurality and minimum entitlement to small schools; Gaelic learners and links to specialist provision.
- 5.1.3 The progress on the actions for improvement will be closely monitored and evaluated at regular intervals over the timeframe set. This ongoing quality assurance will provide mitigation for changes to practice in light of Covid-19, and ensure that the programme of improvement is delivered on time.
- 5.1.4 As the actions are taken forward, regular cognisance will be taken into account of the national developments linked to the national ASL action plan. This brings a further level of scrutiny and quality assurance and will result in Highland’s ASN strategy being in alignment with the most current philosophy and policy. With our

strategy at the fore of ASN development, outcomes for the children and young people of highlands will be improved.

5.1.5 An important part of the improvement plan will be empowering Head Teachers to build capacity in their settings and create sustainable systems to meet the needs of all learners. Collaboration across ASGs, the authority and the Regional Improvement Collaboratives will facilitate sharing of good practice and establish a climate of innovation underpinned by efficient resource management at all levels. A key driver of empowerment is accountability, and so the support and challenge will be set out to all, ensuring equity and consistency across the authority.

5.2 **PSA review**

5.2.1 Benchmarking activity has drawn together the data from every Scottish Local Authority on Pupil Support Assistants. Factors such as the numbers employed, hours per week, and the ratio of PSA to student have all been taken into account, with Highland emerging to have one of the lowest child to PSA ratios in Scotland, as well as lower than comparator authorities i.e. one of the highest levels of investment in PSA resource both currently and over a period of time.

5.2.2 The Additional Support for Learning (ASfL) Action plan states within it a need to measure the impact of Pupil Support Assistants on children and young people's experiences and achievements and recommends that local authorities and school managers should plan a strategy to review deployment, taking account of the recommendations laid out by the Education Endowment Fund. It is therefore timeous that the Highland Council includes these approaches in the wider ASN Improvement Strategy. The work of the national Additional Support for Learning Improvement Group (ASLIG) will support this process.

5.2.3 A review of the role and remit of PSA staff in line with the (ASLIG) with corresponding reviews of training needs/development pathways has been identified within previous engagements and will be included in current improvement planning in connection with trade union discussions.

5.3 **ASN Matrix of Need / Assessment of need**

5.3.1 Currently staff use a matrix to determine ASN allocations based on focussing resource to pupils with the highest levels of identified ASN need (i.e. Level 3 and 4 on a matrix of 1-4). It was agreed that this would need to be reviewed and refreshed as part of the ASN improvement strategy, given that staff have reported that this matrix does not always account for the range of emerging needs across the authority since the matrix' inception. Consideration of the components that make up a revised matrix evaluation, including the weighting to be applied to each factor will be a key consideration for Members and stakeholders.

5.3.2 The development of an assessment matrix at local level or an assessment process will be required once the quantum and allocation methodology has been established as set out in section 5.1.2 above. Both aspects require considerable stakeholder engagement and debate and must also be considered within emergent and innovative best practice that was encouraged at the beginning of school session 2019. For example, the allocation of resource to an ASG, rather than school by school, with Head Teacher and officer discussion and empowerment to best meet the needs of the young people. The expectation is that, through collegiate working in the ASG, flexibility will exist to address the changing needs of pupils during the

year and reprioritise resource with pupil movements between schools and ASG settings.

5.4 **Key Success Criteria**

Both the allocation model to the ASG and the assessment of resource to individual schools within the cluster must achieve the following criteria: reduce bureaucracy, encourage localised decision making and empowerment; and recognise that needs must be met through a range of learning and classroom management strategies that support and encourage self-regulation and independent learning, inclusion and wider well-being.

6. **Next Steps**

6.1 It is essential that the Council engages with Members and key stakeholders before determining preferred options for formal consideration. With students safely returned to schools after lockdown and a strong focus on recovery, the timing is right to commence this stage of the review. To this end, a timeline has been produced for the roll out of Phase 2 engagement activities, which will then be followed by analysis and recommendations.

6.2 The first event in the engagement plan is a seminar for Education Committee Members on 16 November which will include background information, benchmarking data and options appraisal of ASN allocation models. The outcomes of this seminar will help to inform the way in which Member and wider stakeholder engagement will be delivered in the coming weeks and months, prior to formal recommendations coming forward early in the new year to be approved by the Education Committee.

6.3 The following timeline has been produced for the roll out of Phase 2 engagement activities:

- 16 November - Members Seminar
- 23 November – commencement of staff (HT/service partners) engagement
- 30 November – commencement of pupil engagement
- 07 December – commencement of parental and third sector/community group engagement
- December 2020 and January 2021 collation/analysis of responses
- Update report to Education Committee 11 February 2021
- Further reports to come to the Education Committee as required: timescales and content as determined by the process followed above

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning

Date: 12 November 2020

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