

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held remotely on Wednesday 18 November 2020 at 10.35 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam	Ms E Knox
Mrs I Campbell	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr A Christie	Mrs I MacKenzie
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr R MacWilliam
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mrs F Robertson
Mr L Fraser	Mr G Ross
Mr K Gowans	Mr A Sinclair
Mr A Graham	Ms N Sinclair
Mr T Heggie (Vice Chair)	

Religious Representatives:

Mr R Finlay
Ms S Lamont
Mr W Skene

Non-Members also present:

Mrs J Barclay	Mrs A MacLean
Mr R Bremner	Mr D Macpherson
Mr A Henderson	Mr J McGillivray
Mr A Jarvie	Mr C Munro
Mr B Lobban	Mr B Thompson
Mr D Mackay	

In attendance:

Ms D Manson, Chief Executive
Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning
Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)
Ms G Newman, Highland Children's Forum (Third Sector)
Ms S Blyth, Highland Parent Council Partnership

Also in attendance:

Mr T Allison, Director of Public Health, NHS Highland
Mr I Ross, Chair, High Life Highland
Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Mr J Finlayson in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chairman expressed his appreciation to school staff, parents, pupils, officers, Public Health staff and fellow Members for the ongoing resilience and support that all stakeholders continued to show during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr S Mackie.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 4 – Mr A Christie (financial)

Item 5 – Mr A Jarvie and B Thompson (both non-financial)

Item 6 – Mr A Christie (financial), Mr A Jarvie (non-financial) and Mr B Thompson (non-financial)

Item 7 – Ms E Knox (non-financial)

Item 9 – Mr A Christie (financial), Mr K Gowans (financial), Mr T Heggie (non-financial), Mr A Jarvie (non-financial), Ms E Knox (non-financial) and Mr B Thompson (non-financial)

Item 10 – Mr K Gowans (financial), Mr T Heggie (non-financial), Mr A Jarvie (non-financial) and Mr B Thompson (non-financial)

Ms N Sinclair declared a general non-financial interest on the basis that she had children enrolled in nursery and primary school but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her involvement in the discussion.

3. Good News/Outstanding Achievements Naidheachdan Matha/Coileanaidhean Air Leth

There had been circulated a list of outstanding achievements by pupils and schools.

The Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

4. Education Recovery Ath-shlànachadh Foghlaim

Declaration of Interest: Mr A Christie declared a financial interest in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

i. Public Health Slàinte Phoblach

The Director of Public Health, NHS Highland, provided a verbal update during which he gave an overview of issues relating to Covid 19. In presenting data, he pointed out that NHS Highland also included the Argyll and Bute Council area so, when drawing conclusions, Members should bear this in mind.

Relative to other areas, there was a low incidence of Covid 19 in Highland and levels were appearing to be flattening off. Considerable data was available on the Public Health Scotland website which also provided a breakdown as far as locality level. Looking to the future, it was hoped for a continued reduction in infection rates and, whilst it was unlikely that there would be an increase, it was important to continue to adhere to control measures and restrictions. In Education settings there was no evidence of any widespread transmission but, should a pupil feel unwell, the guidance was for the pupil concerned to stay off school. The development of vaccines was to be welcomed but it was unlikely these would be licenced for use for those under 18 years old, the vaccines being targeted at those at higher risk and the elderly.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in response to a question that, in relation to the Test and Protect campaign, it was confirmed that 97% of contacts of someone who had tested positive for Covid 19 had been traced in the Highlands. However, in a school context it was more difficult to predict who the precise contacts were;
- teachers and parents needed support as anxiety levels were prevalent, even if Highland was in Tier 1, and it was important to communicate the scientific message about how to reduce spread to allay these fears;
- there had been a significant outbreak of Covid 19 in a school in Fife and assurances were sought that should similar outbreak occur in Highland an appropriate response would be taken;
- in response to a question it was explained that it was not within NHS Highland's remit to enforce inspection regimes in schools to ensure compliance with standards for hygiene and social distancing. This was a matter for the Council but NHS Highland was able to provide advice as necessary. Members were also informed that the Council's procedures were inspected by the Health and Safety Executive and who had been positive about the Council's approach. Furthermore, advice to schools concerning ventilation had been issued;
- disappointment was expressed that a young person had been sent from Skye to Inverness for a test despite there being a Covid Assessment Centre in Portree; and
- the Director of Public Health was thanked for his support and cooperation with education officers.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

ii. **Recruitment Fastadh**

The Workforce Planning and Staffing Manager provided a verbal update during which Members were informed that, from the start of the school session, appointments to 4 Secondary Head Teacher posts had been made, 3 of which were external candidates. 13 appointments had been made to Primary Head

Teacher posts, again 6 of which were external appointments. Regarding Area Manager posts, 2 appointments had been made to the post of Interim Area Manager to support Head Teachers.

Utilising the Education Recovery Funding, appointments had also been made to six virtual teacher posts to support the provision of on-line learning for any pupils unable to access face to face education. Appointments to the posts across the Associated School Groups (ASGs), as per the plan shared at the last committee meeting, started immediately after the October break and 13.2 FTE primary teaching posts across ASGs had now been appointed. Only 2 posts remained vacant and alternative arrangements had been put in place.

Appointments had also been made to 1.7 FTE of Secondary teaching posts, as well as 34 hours of Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) plus the additional allocation of hours to some existing PSAs. Following representation and discussion with the 4 largest secondary schools regarding the pressure on caseloads for guidance/pupil support teachers which had been exacerbated by lockdown and COVID issues, it has been agreed to appoint 6 FTE additional Principal Teacher of guidance/pupil support posts for the remainder to the school session to reduce caseloads across these schools, helping these schools to further support the health and wellbeing of pupils. Finally, 4 secondary schools which had experienced a higher than anticipated stay-on rate had also been advised that they would receive additional staffing to reflect this.

During discussion, the Members were encouraged by the number of appointments which had been made recently and the high calibre of candidates. However, some schools, such as Lochaber High School, had been unable to appoint to a substantive post. This was exacerbated with out-of-date supply lists and a Head Teacher, in such circumstances, could be faced with the decision to ask a pupil not to come into school if no support was available. The Council's promise to give its young people the best possible education was not therefore being met and a system to provide more up-to-date supply lists was called for. In response, Members were assured that the supply list was a "live" document and was, as a result, up-to-date. ASN appointments were also being made and it was hoped these would be filled very soon.

The Committee **NOTED** the update and that a summary of all appointments would be circulated to all Members.

iii. **Curriculum Curraicealam**

Head Teachers from Newtonmore and Caol Primaries gave a presentation on learning, teaching and assessment. Both of Head teachers had had to deal with outbreaks of Covid within their school communities.

Mr Hamilton had been Head Teacher in Caol Primary for a number of years and now also at the impressive new Caol Campus. He detailed the work which had taken place during the summer preparing for pupils return to school and that teachers and pupils had been keen to return to the learning environment. With Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) the school had employed a Children Services Worker and this had proved invaluable. This hadn't been without its challenges and he

highlighted the need to keep parents informed and to manage staff anxieties and expectations. However, with the support of families, the school team were striving to provide high quality learning and education.

Sarah Fraser had been a Head Teacher at Newtonmore Primary School since August 2016 but, since August 2020, when Newtonmore was clustered with Gergask Primary, she became a non-teaching head covering both schools. A Gaelic speaker, Ms Fraser had also worked for Highland Council as a Gaelic Medium teacher since 1994. Newtonmore was now the main Gaelic Medium (GM) School in Badenoch and Strathspey with a rising roll. She too welcomed the support of parents and outlined how the school had had to adapt. In particular, the Early Years classes had embraced outdoor learning with the opportunity for them to investigate and explore. The school had tried to make the learning environment as normal as possible but, particularly with the GM pupils a dip in oral language ability had transpired during Lockdown. Newtonmore Primary had used its PEF for Pupils Support Assistants and to build an outdoor learning classroom.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the testimonies of the Head Teachers demonstrated how resilient pupils had been and how the hard work of pupils, staff, parents and communities had facilitated the return to school;
- information was sought, and provided, as to how intergenerational activities were incorporated;
- support was voiced for the outdoor classroom for Newtonmore Primary; and
- the mental health of parents was recognised, especially during Lockdown when incomes might have dropped and it was important, where possible, to support them through newsletters and emails etc.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

5. Improving Outcomes for Young People Update Fios às Ùr mu Leasachadh Thoraidhean do Dhaoine Òga

Declarations of Interest: Mr A Jarvie and Mr B Thompson declared non-financial interests in this item as Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/20/20 dated 4 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- introducing the report, the Chairman pointed out that Members had had the opportunity to attend Attainment Workshops which explained how Insight worked and what level of data access Members could get to relating to their local schools. However, the Scottish Government had recently indicated that the confirmed Insight data for last session, which the Council and schools would normally have had by now, would not be available until February 2020. This

was unfortunate in terms of looking at the most recently confirmed exam results which, as already discussed at Committee, had been very positive. The report also looked at how the Virtual Academy was supporting attainment;

- the intention was for Education officers to attend ward meetings to present the secondary schools leavers' attainment profile in the key measures. However, the Head Teacher or a member of the school's Senior Management Team should also attend, being in a good position to provide this data;
- the Virtual Academy was to be welcomed but the numbers involved were disappointing and a commitment was sought to bring back a fuller report to an early meeting of the Committee as to how the Virtual Academy could be expanded, together with a timetable;
- the Virtual Academy made no mention of Gaelic and, to help address the problem of delivering subjects at secondary school level in Gaelic Medium, this needed to be included;
- the virtual comparator referred to in Appendix 1 of the report showed Highland either on or above the line but a clearer picture as to what the virtual comparator was made up of was required to accurately assess attainment; and
- there was positive feedback from those Members who attended the workshops who had found them invaluable.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** that the Scottish Government had taken the decision not to produce INSIGHT data until February 2021 and that Members would receive a full report once data had been analysed and benchmarked with national data;
- AGREED** the content of ward attainment meeting data to be presented by officers, and Head Teachers where possible, and the tool kit provided to allow Members to scrutinise data;
- NOTED** the positive attainment results achieved through the delivery of senior phase courses within The Highland Council virtual academy;
- AGREED** that officers would bring a report to future Education Committees on the impact of the Scottish Attainment Challenge audit on Highland schools; and
- AGREED** that a report on proposals for expanding Highland Virtual Academy provision be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

6. Developing a Whole Systems Approach to Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing **Ro-innleachd Mathais**

Declarations of Interest:

Mr A Christie declared a financial interest in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

Mr A Jarvie and **Mr B Thompson** declared non-financial interests as Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/21/20 dated 30 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning.

The Chair commented that the importance of this item could not be underestimated, especially at present, and this was reflected in the fact that a paper on the same topic had been presented to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee the previous week.

Supporting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of all Highland citizens, including children and young people, had never been more important and to do so effectively it was necessary to use a whole system approach which linked into the systems already in place as part of the GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child) agenda and the Highland Practice Model.

The first recommendation in the report asked Members to not only be involved in supporting the initiative but to increase their knowledge and understanding of what constituted good mental health and what caused stress, anxiety and poor mental health. The report provided an opportunity for Members to learn and understand more about mental health whilst also supporting a way forward that looked to improve how children, young people and families were supported.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- mental health issues needed to be treated with a psychosocial approach complemented by medicine. However, it was also important to recognise and support young people experiencing “normal” distress;
- for the initiative to work it was important to ensure that schools, youth workers, family support workers etc worked together rather than in silos. In addition, it was necessary to listen to their views in terms of what might work locally – eg a hub or some other facility;
- the report to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee had referred to working with Community Partnerships and a timeframe of 2027, and concern was expressed in that regard. Whilst there was no issue with Community Partnerships being part of the team, very few of them were currently working well in Highland and it was suggested that working with schools was the most appropriate route. However, Councillor G Ross, Chair of Inverness Community Partnership, expressed disappointment that there was not more reference to Community Partnerships in the report, particularly in recommendations ii and iv. He emphasised that work was taking place at a local level, Inverness Community Partnership having already established a mental health and wellbeing group, and he would welcome the opportunity to be involved in a whole systems approach;
- the need to focus on transitions from primary school to secondary school was emphasised;
- Members welcomed the reference throughout the report to supporting children, families and staff;
- children were more resilient and resourceful than they were given credit for and the information in the report suggested that most were dealing with the Covid pandemic better than expected. However, it was not surprising to read that it was the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children who were most at risk of mental health issues;
- if adults’ mental health and wellbeing was not looked after this would impact on the children in their care, and reference was made to research in that regard.

There was a lot in the report about what should be done to protect the mental health of children and young people but less about what action was being taken to support the mental health and wellbeing of staff such as teachers and Pupil Support Assistants;

- support was expressed for the whole system and whole society approach that the report aspired to;
- in relation to the counselling funding from the Scottish Government, it was understood that it had been distributed to schools but there did not appear to be clarity as to how it would be spent. Support was expressed for counselling being embedded in school culture and delivered by qualified practitioners as the report proposed. However, there was a need for specific actions and timescales. In addition, it was suggested that if the school counselling service was to reflect a whole systems approach it should also be made available to school staff. There did not appear to be anything in the funding criteria to prevent this, and thanks were expressed to the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning who had indicated that she would look into the matter;
- a whole systems approach sometimes indicated a broad approach that was difficult to accomplish and ran the risk of heightening expectations but in this case the emphasis on preventative approaches, counselling provision in schools and training key stakeholders in counselling was exactly right;
- as referred to in the report, Fortrose Academy was an example of a school where a whole systems approach had been successful and Local Members described the measures that had been implemented and the work that had taken place with parents and employers. In particular, the provision of a mental health worker within the school for two days per week had had a significant impact;
- the current picture in terms of mental health was bleak as a result of Covid and joining up services to achieve better outcomes for young people had never been more important. Members cited statistics on anxiety levels amongst expectant mothers and referred to research on the long-term effects of stress hormones during pregnancy. In addition, reference was made to recent high-profile cases of teenage suicide, a lack of social interaction as a result of Covid restrictions appearing to be a common theme. Psychiatrists had reported that many of them were overworked and could not manage their caseload; long waiting times for routine GP appointments and referrals added a needless delay to people getting the support they needed; and the already diminished capacity of services was being compounded by higher demand;
- some Members expressed uncertainty as to what the report set out to achieve and information was sought on the current position, including the number of staff, their location and their workload, and where it was hoped to get to. Having a mental health professional within a school to whom guidance teachers could make referrals would remove bureaucracy and waiting times but, without measurable outcomes, it was questioned how Members would know that the approach had been a success. In addition, clarification was sought as to what was meant by the statement in the report that “the capacity and ambition within communities to provide localised support to families provides an excellent opportunity for a holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing rooted in communities first.”;
- whilst the funding of approximately £1m was very welcome, it probably equated to one counsellor per ASG. It was important to know what was needed, how much of that was covered by the £1m and what additional resource was available as, whilst £1m was a lot of money, there was a significant possibility it would only scratch the surface;

- it was understood that the detail of how the counselling funding would be spent was to be decided at local level and this was welcomed;
- as stated in the report, mental health was not just an absence of mental illness, and it was important to take it seriously. Mental health and wellbeing was relevant to all, and everyone had experienced, to a greater or lesser extent, the impact of anxiety during the Covid pandemic;
- it was important to recognise the limitations of counselling as highlighted in section 9 of the report;
- it was understood that there were issues with access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in some schools and waiting lists could be long, and information was sought on whether there was a strategy for how the new counselling funding would interact with existing services or if it depended on individual ASGs or schools;
- the intention to deliver ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) aware/informed services was welcomed;
- the report did not address resource, which would be key when considering what services might look like;
- the traditional mental health services model was unsustainable and had been for a number of years, and it was right that the report alluded to the role of communities;
- mental health issues needed to be addressed at an early stage and long waiting lists were not acceptable;
- concern was expressed as to how the proposals in the report would be implemented in such a way that they made a difference on the ground;
- additional funding alone was not necessarily helpful given the issues previously experienced in Highland in terms of recruiting staff, particularly mental health professionals, and information was sought on whether any work had been done in relation to the procurement of external services that could be delivered online; and
- the Highland Children and Young People's Forum (the Forum) welcomed the report and its focus on a whole systems approach and the child's voice. Mental health and wellbeing had been raised by children and young people in several the Forum's reports and they had consistently asked for better mental health understanding in schools and a more joined up approach. The recent Letters from Lockdown report had highlighted that young people recognised the overall anxiety as a result of Covid and wanted to be able to provide peer support and have the information to do so. The Forum was working with the Integrated Children's Services Board to develop engagement with children and young people across third sector organisations in Highland around the five identified priorities, including mental health and transitions, and it was hoped that this would be an ongoing dialogue with children and young people. Inspire Highland, the Forum's young people's participation group, had a sub-group looking at mental health and it would be helpful if they had an opportunity to present to Members of the Education Committee and the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee. In that regard, it was requested that consideration be given to a seminar bringing together both Committees, NHS Highland and the Third Sector, as well as young people from Inspire Highland and those taking part in the engagement work. It was proposed that young people be at the centre of the seminar and that discussions take place on what was needed, what difference it would make and how it would be measured.

Officers responded in detail to the points raised, during which it was explained that the report set out a proposal for approval so that a strategy could be created. Much of the detail requested by Members, including impact measures, examples of which were provided, would be in the strategy. In addition, it was confirmed that the Chief Executives of public sector agencies in Highland had identified mental health and wellbeing as one of their top priorities and a meeting was scheduled to take place the following day at which the issue of resourcing would be considered. The Chief Executive undertook to update Members following the meeting.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to become involved in this initiative and increase Members' knowledge and understanding of good mental health and wellbeing, what caused stress in the individual and in organisations and how the Council could effectively promote wellbeing and support resilience in Highland communities;
- ii. to acknowledge the work already being done across Education and Learning to support wellbeing and resilience and the plans to build on this and to create coherence across the system – including networking with colleagues in Health and Social Care, 3rd sector partners, NHS Highland services, High Life Highland and the Health and Social Care Committee. This would also include making links with the work of the Communities and Place Committee building upon the COVID response from volunteers across Highland communities where many volunteers developed skills and approaches locally as part of the humanitarian response. The capacity and ambition within communities to provide localised support to families provided an excellent opportunity for a holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing rooted in communities first;
- iii. to recognise The Highland Council's commitment to being an ACE Aware Council and to increase Members' knowledge and understanding of the adversity in childhood and how this could manifest as distress in schools and might later result in mental ill-health if not supported effectively at an early stage;
- iv. the ambitious approach proposed to more consistently support the wellbeing of children, families and staff across all Highland schools through the application of a framework of support, service provision and training over the next 5 years. This framework would map out the role of mental health support services, family support, school and care support, resources for curriculum development and training and approaches to working with communities to develop a community first response; and
- v. to explore the possibility of a seminar in conjunction with the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee, NHS Highland and the Third Sector.

7. Additional Support Needs Transformation Update Fios às Ùr mu Fheumalachdan Taice a Bharrachd

Declaration of Interest: Ms E Knox declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Board Member of CHIP+ but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/22/20 dated 12 November 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer - Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- the Chairman explained that the report set out how the Council intended to develop its plans for Additional Support Needs (ASN) to fit in with the Scottish Government's national review of ASN so that there would be synergy between what was happening in Highland and nationally. It also detailed the different types and timescales for engagement with different groups, including Members, and it had been hoped to host a workshop for, initially, Education Committee Members. Unfortunately few Members had attended so the workshop had been postponed but would be open to all Members next time;
- whilst seminars and workshops enable issues to be explored in greater detail and to involve third sector organisations, reports and decisions had to come back to the Education Committee;
- concern was expressed that the report lacked detail, context and a sense of urgency in taking ASN transformation forward. It suggested the current model was not working, neither in terms of the quantum nor the matrix, but an examination was needed to determine why it wasn't working;
- it was unclear if the purpose was an overall review of ASN Transformation or specifically an examination of the needs matrix and the allocation model;
- the consultation that had taken place earlier in the year had generated action points but these had not been detailed, there was no information as to what had happened as a result and whether they had been successful. Furthermore, the report stated that the current allocation model was not delivering improved outcomes but there was no analysis as to why this was the case;
- although a timeline had been produced for Phase 2 engagements there was no detail about these engagements e.g. how it was to be done, who specifically it was going to be done with and if Local Members would be allowed to participate take part;
- when deciding the quantum of resource allocated to a school or ASG it was important to capture rural data;
- the fact that Highland was emerging as having one of the lowest child to Pupil Support Assistant (PSA) ratios in Scotland, as well as lower than comparator authorities, should be celebrated. PSAs were important and should not be an area in which to make savings;
- when looking at comparators there were several complexities which needed to be considered e.g. the state and capacity of the schools and the fact that number of PSAs had halved nationally. The argument that other authorities had fewer PSA had to be taken in context that the number of ASN teachers in Highland had been steadily falling and it now had the lowest number of ASN teachers. Highland also had the lowest teacher;pupil ratio of 62.4 per 1000 pupils, thus placing additional pressure on teachers and schools and emphasising the need for increased ASN resources to support the learning journey of children;
- it should be an ambition to have smaller class sizes as this enable teachers to provide more individual support to pupils;
- devolving decisions about ASN allocation to school and ASG levels was welcomed as they were better placed to understand local circumstances and need;
- Members were aware of the anxiety of parents, especially those of children with ASN who, in some cases, had already struggled to access sufficient support. A lot of engagement had already taken place and this had raised expectations of parents and schools so it was important to move forward at a pace; and

- given the importance of the subject, it was questioned why the report had been received late.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the work undertaken thus far in the Additional Support Needs Improvement Plan;
- ii. **AGREED** the proposal for extensive Member and stakeholder engagement; and
- iii. **AGREED** that options would be brought back to the Education Committee for Member consideration and approval early in the new year.

8. Early Learning and Childcare 1140 Hours Fios às ùr mu Thràth-ionnsachadh is Chùram-chloinne

There had been circulated Report No EDU/23/20 dated 22 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- there were a number of issues affecting the provision of Early Learning and Childcare in Kinmylies Primary and a position statement was sought for Ward Members as soon as possible;
- conflicting information was circulating as to the provision of Early Learning and Childcare in the Milton of Leys area with some projections given that it was unlikely to be provided until 2022 at the earliest. As some information related to land acquisition Councillor K Gowans would be updated directly;
- reference was made to the nurse accommodation at Cradlehall Primary which was unable to be used due to the poor state of the toilets. This lack of maintenance was unlikely to be unique to this school and it was therefore suggested that the lack of proper maintenance was resulting in a lack of capacity;
- given the considerable housing development detailed in the Inner Moray Forth Development Plan, and other housing developments not yet known of, it was important to build in a level of contingency when planning forward;
- expectations had been raised that 1140 hours Early Learning Childcare was to be provided at Lochardil Primary and there had been disappointment when this had not materialised. However, this was now going to take place in January 2021;
- information was also sought as to the provision of Early Learning and Childcare in the Tornagrain and Stratton areas;
- while welcoming the progress that was now being made with the provision of 1140 childcare hours, it was queried why Members at the start of the year had been told it would be necessary to delay projects; and
- officers were thanked for the work now taking place.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the updated position regarding Early Learning and Childcare and provision of 1140 hours;
- ii. **NOTED** the further progress towards delivering 1140 hours in all Highland settings;

- iii. **NOTED** the current status of Early Learning and Childcare capital projects and work being taken forward to progress project delivery;
- iv. **NOTED** the updates provided regarding ongoing discussion with the Scottish Government and other local and national developments; and
- v. **AGREED** that a briefing on the latest proposals in relation to Kinmylies Primary Nursery be provided to Ward Members.

**9. Revenue Budget Monitoring 2nd Quarter 2020/21
Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach 2^{na} Cairteal 2020/21**

Declarations of Interest:

Mr A Christie declared a financial interest in this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest as his wife was an employee of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie and Mr B Thompson declared non-financial interests as Directors of High Life Highland and **Ms E Knox** declared a non-financial interest as a Board Member of CHIP+ but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/24/20 dated 27 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning.

The chairman highlighted that the projected multi-million overspend had been reduced to a forecasted £720,000 overspend, representing 0.3% of the Education Service budget of just under £212,000.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the revenue budget outturn forecast for the year; and
- ii. the improvement in forecast as a result of adjustment in costs and additional funding.

**10. High Life Highland Progress Report
Aithisg Adhartais High Life na Gàidhealtachd**

Declarations of Interest:

Mr K Gowans declared a financial interest in this item as his wife was an employee of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

Mr T Heggie, Mr A Jarvie and Mr B Thompson declared non-financial interests as Directors of High Life Highland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interests did not preclude their involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/25/20 dated 9 November 2020 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland (HLH).

The chairman highlighted that due to the impact of Covid-19 on biannual reporting requirements this was the first High Life Highland report to the Education Committee since November 2019. The report provided an update on the valuable work that HLH had been undertaking over the year to support communities and schools despite the closure of all HLH facilities in March 2020. The chairman pointed out that through innovation and a determined approach many services had been moved online. The work of HLH had been further recognised by Drew Hendry MP, Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, when he paid tribute to the more than 500 HLH staff who signed up to volunteer during the pandemic.

The Chief Executive, High Life Highland, gave a presentation in amplification of the report during which he reported on the company's performance, digital innovation during lockdown, recovery of services and highlighted that youth work would be a priority focus moving forward. Furthermore, HLH had received the distinguished Gold Award in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme as a result of support to serving veterans and their families.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- the wide-ranging work of High Life Highland, particularly the responsiveness to the Covid-19 pandemic and achieving the Gold Award through the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme was commended;
- engaging youth in programming was vital to avoid the anti-social behaviour that had been increasing during the pandemic due to the deficit of facilities available to them. As a result, the elite athlete program was warmly welcomed with a suggestion that sites be located in the East side of Inverness where there was a large youth population and increased deprivation. Furthermore, HLH youth workers had been doing outstanding work in their communities throughout the pandemic. In response, the Chief Executive, High Life Highland, confirmed that elite athlete development was an important step in facilitating young people achieving their potential where they live, study and grow while highlighting that HLH had always strived to create opportunities for everyone at an affordable price. In addition, partnership working with Third Sector Organisations remained an important step in engaging young people;
- information was sought, and provided, on the reopening of community centres whereby it was emphasised that a balanced approach was required as a result of challenges due to budget limitations, age of the buildings and limited ventilation which restricted the options of services that became available; and
- in response to a question, it was explained that the decision to furlough staff was a challenging one with priority being given to securing/saving jobs. However, it was stressed that many staff would be furloughed on a part-time rather than full-time basis and HLH continued ongoing efforts through the Wellbeing Team to maintain contact with staff who had been impacted.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the excellent partnership working and the contributions that HLH staff had made to the Council's resilience work during lockdown;
- ii. the services that had been delivered during lockdown through the innovative use of technology, including over 2 million online customer engagements;
- iii. the update on the recovery work which was underway to re-establish services which HLH delivered on behalf of the Council;
- iv. the updates on facility opening; staff feedback and health and wellbeing; customer feedback and next steps (at Appendix B of the report);
- v. that, in the light of the above and the restrictions which had been imposed by the coronavirus pandemic, HLH had met or exceeded the outcomes expected in the Service Delivery Contract with The Highland Council for the operating period to September 2020;
- vi. that HLH's 2019/20 financial statements were unqualified and prepared on a going concern basis;
- vii. that HLH's financial position had improved throughout the year due to the actions taken by the HLH Board but that there could still be a deficit which it was not possible for it to contain within its reserves;
- viii. that HLH would be very likely to face significant financial pressure into the next financial year as it recovered income streams; and
- ix. that HLH would explore opportunities for capital development with **sportscotland** to support the recovery of the Highlands from the coronavirus pandemic.

The meeting concluded at 3.45 pm.