

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held remotely on Thursday 20 May 2021 at 10.35 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr T Heggie (Vice Chair)
Mrs I Campbell	Mr A Henderson (substitute)
Mr A Christie	Mr A Jarvie
Mrs M Cockburn	Ms E Knox
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr L Fraser	Mr A Sinclair
Mr K Gowans	Ms N Sinclair
Mr A Graham	

Religious Representatives:

Mr R Finlay
Ms S Lamont

Youth Convener:

Ms A Johnston

Non-Members also present:

Mrs J Barclay	Mrs E McAllister
Mr A Baxter	Mr J McGillivray
Mrs G Campbell-Sinclair	Ms L Munro
Mrs H Carmichael	Mrs M Paterson
Mrs A MacLean	Ms T Robertson
Mr D Macpherson	Mr B Thompson

In attendance:

Ms D Manson, Chief Executive
Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning
Mr B Porter, Head of Resources
Ms L Walker, Education Support Officer
Ms M MacDonald, Professional Learning, Leadership and Empowerment Team
Ms T Stones, Head Teacher, Dornoch Academy
Mr R Quigley, ICTiLearning, Improvement and Strategy
Mr D Paterson, Quality Improvement Officer
Mr I Jackson, Education Officer
Ms R Mackay, Head Teacher, Holm Primary School
Ms J Skene-Maclean, Head Teacher, Kyle and Kyleakin Primary Schools
Mr R Campbell, Estate Strategy Manager, Environment and Infrastructure
Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)
Ms G Newman, Highland Children's Forum (Third Sector)
Mr J Hasson, Highland Parent Council Partnership
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator

Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator
Mrs O Bayon, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms S Amor, Child Health Commissioner, NHS Highland
Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland
Ms Y Ross, Youth Development Officer, High Life Highland
Mr D Cundall, Caithness Cares Project

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 Chair stated that today's meeting was important as, since the Committee had last met in February 2021, there had been many changes in terms of lockdown easing and returning pupils to school. The meeting would focus on the return to school and the plans going forward and would once again recognise the great work of all school staff, parents, pupils, communities and key third sector stakeholders. Whilst acknowledging the many challenges being faced, the meeting provided an opportunity to recognise the positive things happening in all educational settings in Highland.

He went on to welcome Anja Johnston, who had recently taken up the role of Youth Convener, to her first meeting of the Committee. Anja had previously worked as an Assistant Youth Worker with High Life Highland and was actively involved in volunteering with Scouts Scotland. As Youth Convener, Anja provided a consistent link for Elected Members and senior Council officials, representing young people's views, and would act as a sounding board for youth issues in the Highlands. Anja would attend full Council and Community Planning meetings and had full voting rights on the Education Committee with speaking rights at all other Council Committees.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence
Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr S Mackie, Mr R MacWilliam, Mrs F Robertson, Mr G Ross and Mr W Skene.

2. Declarations of Interest
Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 5 – Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)
Item 8 – Mr K Gowans (financial)
Item 9 – Mr A Christie (financial) and Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

Item 14 – Mr A Christie (financial), Mr K Gowans (financial) and Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)

Mr T Heggie declared a non-financial interest, as a Director of High Life Highland, in any item that might raise discussion on 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.

Ms N Sinclair declared a general non-financial interest, but particularly relevant to items 4 and 10, as a parent of two children attending Newton Park 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

Ms L Walker, Education Support Officer, informed Members of outstanding achievements by pupils and schools, a digital summary of which had been circulated via ThingLink in advance of the Committee.

The Chair then introduced a short video created by the Corporate Communications team which highlighted the Council's recruitment of young people for the recent Scottish Parliament election and the organisation's engagement with them in the democratic process. During the video, Members heard some of the young people involved outlining what they had enjoyed, learned and gained from the experience.

The Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements and video.

4. Return to School Tilleadh dhan Sgoil

In introducing this item, the Chair commented that despite the challenges of the last year it had been an exciting term for Highland schools as children and young people had reconnected with face to face learning. School staff had shown tremendous resilience and enthusiasm as they had coped with the periods of remote learning, the need for careful risk mitigation and other challenges that had arisen as pupils had returned to school while the pandemic continued. Secondary schools had faced an additional challenge as a result of the SQA's Alternative Certification Model and teachers' professionalism and compassion had been hugely important in supporting young people through the assessment process. School communities were at the heart of the Council's work and gratitude was expressed to Head Teachers and all other school staff for their hard work and commitment as the end of a very challenging school session approached.

The Chair, Vice Chair and Education Committee spokesperson for the Opposition, who had been actively involved in the Return to School Project Board and meetings with the Highland Parent Council Partnership, officers and Head Teachers, then provided verbal updates on the return to school summer session 2021, during which detailed information was provided on key areas including: the Return to School Project Board and the collaborative and cross-service work that had taken place to support the return to school; ICT in Learning; Early Learning and Childcare; Scottish

Qualifications Authority – Alternative Certification Model; Education Scotland; recruitment; leadership; and parental/partner engagement.

The Child Health Commissioner, NHS Highland, referred to the ongoing dialogue between NHS Highland and the Council and expressed appreciation for how hard colleagues in the Education and Learning Service and schools had worked to support the work of the specialist health protection team and the wider public health team to ensure an appropriate response in relation to Covid. Whilst the current number of Covid cases in Highland was low, ongoing attention to detail in terms of face coverings, hand washing and physical distancing was important and it was necessary to stay mindful about mixing as lockdown restrictions eased, with outdoors continuing to be safer than indoors. She went on to summarise the current testing and symptom management arrangements in schools and explained that the Public Health Consultant leading on Covid was preparing a letter, clarifying several key points, which would be distributed to Head Teachers at the end of the week.

The Chair of the Highland Parent Council Partnership (HPCP) explained that the HPCP had been working closely with the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning and her team. The work that had been done had been energetic and the ideas and processes being taken forward were creative and, it was considered, would reveal a different side to how schools were performing in the coming months and years. He commended teachers, support staff and officers for their efforts and looked forward to working together going forward.

During discussion, information was sought on the number of young people that had asked to repeat S6. The Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning undertook to look at the data and respond to Councillor Cockburn outwith the meeting.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the update.

5. Children and Young People Summer of Hope Programme Prògram Samhraidh Chloinne is Dhaoine Òga

Declaration of Interest: Mr A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Director of High Life Highland but, as a Council appointee and in terms of the specific exclusion in Section 5.18 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, confirmed that he would remain and take part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/07/21 dated 25 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair was sure all Members would be delighted to see this report given the difficult times young people had lived through during the last year. He welcomed the funding from the Scottish Government to support the Summer of Hope Programme (the Programme), adding that he was certain all Members would support any and all programmes that looked to sustain improved wellbeing and engagement which would help make readiness for learning more accessible and enjoyable for children and young people when the new school session began in August 2021.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- whilst recognising the need to target priority pupils, Members welcomed the Programme being made available to all pupils;
- there appeared to be some gaps in terms of location of delivery and an assurance was sought, and provided, that all areas of Highland would have equal and equitable access to the Programme;
- the impact of Covid was not going to be addressed by the end of the summer and information was sought, and provided, as to what could be done to encourage the Scottish Government to provide repeat funding to build on the Programme in 2022, how it was intended to evaluate the Programme, both qualitatively and quantitatively, and what surveys could be undertaken with the young people that would be experiencing the fabulous activities on offer;
- the Highland Children and Young People's Forum (HCYPF) welcomed the report and the partnership approach being taken. Any progress that had been made in terms of closing the inequality gap had been undone by the pandemic, many young people at the wrong end of the gap having had a tough year due to greater caring responsibilities, increased stresses at home, domestic abuse etc. However, at the other end of the gap, some young people had leaped ahead having had one to one learning support from parents and the opportunity to develop life skills. It was also recognised that there were young people who were not at the wrong end of the gap but had struggled with mental health or other issues, and it was important that the Programme was inclusive. It was suggested that, after the summer, it was necessary to look at mentorship or tutors to support the young people that had fallen behind. The proposed evaluation of the Programme was welcomed, as was the inclusion of a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment in the report, and it was added that the project would not only help children be healthy and active but would help them be included; and
- reference was made to the instructive and valuable Health and Social Care Committee the previous day, and the collaborative work taking place between Education and Learning and Health and Social Care teams was welcomed. It was important to take cognisance of the challenges and risks facing families and, as an organisation, to continue to emphasise the collaborative work taking place and ensure it was Highland-wide. Data was a tool, and it was necessary to receive updates at every Committee as the impact of Covid would be ongoing.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to the delivery of a 2021 summer of hope programme and outcomes as described within the report, within the expected funding envelope of £500,000 from Scottish Government, and with detailed finalisation of the programme and implementation to be assigned to officers; and
- ii. to the principles set out in section 4 of the report to support the readiness for learning of children and young people.

6. Wellbeing Counselling Update **Fios às Ùr mu Chomhairleachadh Soirbheis**

In introducing this item, the Chair commented that the Committee had discussed the importance of counselling in schools many times. However, whilst Members had talked about how to allocate funding and what was available in each area, education was about children, young people, staff, schools, and communities, and hearing and understanding their contexts, successes and challenges. This item was therefore

being presented by Head Teachers from schools in two different settings which it was hoped would help Members appreciate what was being done across the vast local authority area and the impact it was having in terms of supporting young people.

Ms R Mackay, Head Teacher, Holm Primary School, and Ms J Skene-Maclean, Head Teacher, Kyle and Kyleakin Primary Schools, then gave verbal updates on school counselling provision from two different perspectives, Holm Primary School having only been involved for a few months whereas schools in Skye and Lochalsh had been able to offer children and young people a professional counselling service for many years. Counselling was an important step in the journey towards ensuring the positive mental health of young people and detailed information was provided on the arrangements that were in place, the many and varied issues young people might require counselling for and the positive impacts of counselling, as well as any associated challenges. In addition, feedback was provided from parents and young people on their experiences of school counselling.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- hearing perspectives from two different school settings was helpful and the powerful, inspirational and informative contributions from both Head Teachers were welcomed;
- it was necessary to minimise bureaucracy to ensure that accessing counselling services was as easy as possible;
- information was sought, and provided, on whether secondary schools were as fully engaged with counselling; how the pupils who received counselling were selected; whether there was any unmet need and, if so, whether there was sufficient funding to meet it; how Head Teachers worked with other agencies to assist families that might require other services; and the interface with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services;
- it was encouraging to hear that there was prompt intervention on mental health issues;
- people often underestimated the positive impact counselling could have on lives;
- the importance of working with community planning partners to take this forward was emphasised;
- the Chair suggested that consideration be given to a seminar to better Members' understanding of the current practice model;
- reference was made to a community action plan survey carried out by the Lochalsh Collaboration, the results of which indicated that mental health issues were far more prevalent in the 18 and under age group than older age groups, and it was questioned whether this was because young people were more aware of and spoke more openly about mental health issues. The Chair added that this highlighted the need to ensure that the Committee continued to hear from young people; and
- it was highlighted that the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee had made a commitment, at its meeting on 19 May 2021, to carry out an asset mapping exercise in respect of mental health support services, which would also identify unmet need.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the update; and

- ii. **AGREED** that consideration be given to a Members' Seminar on the current practice model.

In terms of Standing Order 9, the Committee **AGREED** to consider item 14 at this stage.

14. High Life Highland Update Report Aithisg às Ùr mu High Life na Gàidhealtachd

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 on the grounds that a close family member 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 A Jarvie declared a non-financial interest as a Director of High Life Highland but, as a Council appointee and in terms of the specific exclusion in Section 5.18 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, confirmed that he would remain and take part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/15/21 dated 28 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chief Executive, High Life Highland (HLH), gave a presentation in amplification of the report during which he provided a general update, reported on the company's performance against key performance indicators over the last year, HLH's recovery plan, facility opening and the charity's on-going digital innovation. A short video clip was also shown which highlighted the benefits of HLH's High Life Highland's virtual presence.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- it was confirmed that it was the main charity which would have responsibility for bringing back in-house the operation of Bellfield Park and, depending on the decision of the City of Inverness Area Committee on 27 May 2021, which would be involved in discussions around the running of Inverness's Events and Festivals programme;
- HLH was commended on its innovative approach which had enabled music tuition to continue during both Lockdowns with further details were sought, and provided, as to how this had been achieved. Although there had been a decrease in demand, 70% of pupils had been retained;
- additional detail was sought on each of HLH's services to illustrate their key benefits and to enable Councillors to promote them and celebrate their success. It would also allow a greater understanding of the challenges the charity faced;
- it was not surprising that *highlife* subscriptions had dropped but, as facilities reopened, the number of subscriptions would no doubt recover. However,

further information was sought as to the strategy that was to be adopted in the interim;

- online engagement had increased and a blended approach would be adopted going forward; and
- appreciation was expressed for the exceptional hard work of HLH's employees during the pandemic.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the services that were delivered by High Life Highland during lockdown through the increased use of technology, including over 4 million online customer engagements in 2020/21;
- ii. the general updates, including those on High Life Highland's recovery work; and
- iii. the opening plan for High Life Highland services from 26 April 2021 as set out in Appendix A of the report.

7. Caithness Cares Progress Report Aithisg Adhartais Cùram Ghallaibh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/08/21 dated 30 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair introduced two young people, Dylan Cundall and Anja Johnston, who spoke about their involvement in the Caithness Cares project which included presenting to Elected Members on Personal and Social Education (PSE) and sexual abuse within Caithness and the wider Highlands, and sharing and identifying potential solutions to the issues that young people faced on a day to day basis. In relation to PSE and supporting young people, one suggestion put forward was expanding the Safe Highlanders event currently delivered to P7 pupils by bringing people into PSE classes and Secondary Schools to deliver life skills to young people in a more intimate way.

The Chair of the Caithness Committee then spoke to the pathfinder project, commenting that before it had been agreed there had been a growing sense of despair amongst the community and Elected Members. Longstanding challenges around poverty, long-term ill health, addiction and rural isolation had been magnified by the pressures of Covid and, tragically, many lives had been lost to overdose or suicide, many of them young people. The Community Resilience Group, with support from the local Community Partnership, had worked tirelessly to support the most vulnerable people and a campaign group called No More Lost Souls had given voice to the frustration and sadness that many shared. The arrival of the funding for the Caithness Cares project had been crucial in regaining some sense of control over the circumstances and gratitude was expressed to Elected Members for allowing this important work to begin in Caithness and to officers for their support in taking it forward. In particular, thanks were expressed to Tina Stones and Yvonne Ross for their wisdom, hard work and compassion.

The structure continued to evolve and there had been many early learning points. From the beginning, one of the greatest challenges had been managing public expectation around what Caithness Cares could deliver. The issues were deeply ingrained and the funding pot was not bottomless, so it had been necessary to be cognisant of the reality that whole system transformation took time, that the funding was specific for 5-26 year olds and there was a high level of corporate governance

and data collection that needed to be undertaken, and that there were multiple corporate and community partners all with their own remits and challenges. Early intervention and prevention were critical in building resilience for future generations but the tide would not turn overnight and sadly it could not be guaranteed that there would be no more lost souls.

However, what could be done and what had been done was to work with urgency, pragmatism and passion to move the project forward as quickly as possible. The report highlighted a substantial range of actions that had been put in place within a few months, from PSE curriculum to street work to supporting the recovery community. This could not have happened without the astonishing outpouring of support from local educationalists, health workers, youth workers, volunteers, community activists and people with lived experience of the issues. Throughout the public sector providers – the Council, NHS Highland, Police Scotland and High Life Highland – there had been a concerted effort to remove bureaucratic barriers to move things along. In fact, the biggest challenge had been to manage the response and put together structures that captured the enthusiasm and channelled it into a coherent strategy. The importance of communication and engagement had not been underestimated but it had been underlined massively in the past few months. It was necessary to really listen rather than just inform, and, on a few occasions, she had been surprised by what she had heard, which often went against her own assumptions. Most of all, it was important to listen to those with lived experience of mental health issues and addiction, and the young people at the heart of the project.

With regards to the structure, the tiered system sought to address the cluttered and confusing landscape. Caithness Cares would span the Council's Education and Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committees, NHS Highland and the work of the Community Planning Partnership. However, young people would not come with a label or present as a tier. Each person was a unique individual and it was crucial that, whatever corporate structure was drawn up, people knew how to ask for help to make them safe, and the community fabric that was there to help them knew what support they could access and who to contact for it. Members talked about SHANAARI indicators, primary and secondary care, tertiary prevention, GIRFEC and all the associated policies and acronyms. However, this was the invisible scaffolding that linked everything together. It was not what communities should have to navigate, and they needed it to be demystified. Communities needed funding and staff and to know who did what. For lost souls, this could literally be the difference between life and death. In conclusion, she welcomed the report and looked forward to continuing to support its ambitions in Highland's communities.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Chair concurred regarding the need to demystify the various acronyms, models etc and where they intersected, and it was hoped that, working in conjunction with the Chair of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee and relevant officers, something could be pulled together that would support Members as well as service users;
- whilst online resources were available, they were scattered and young people often did not know they existed. It would be helpful to create an app that was quick and easy to use and had all the information in one place so that young people could actively help themselves or support others. Reference was made to the suicide prevention app which was a step in the right direction;

- on a point being raised, it was confirmed that the timescale for rolling out the project to other areas was set out in the report;
- reference was made to Wellbeing Black Isle, which had been established in response to a series of suicides and attempted suicides, particularly amongst young people, and it was suggested it would be helpful for the Chair of the Caithness Committee and the young people involved in Caithness Cares to attend a meeting to exchange ideas and get an idea of the challenges in each area and how they might be overcome. Whilst it was recognised that localised approaches might be required, there were lessons that could be learned from each other;
- the views of the young people in attendance were sought on how PSE should be delivered in the future and it was queried what their involvement had been in the development of mental health support for young people in Caithness and how their engagement in the Caithness Cares project had enabled them to be a stronger advocate for young people in their area. In relation to PSE, it was explained that a wide consultation was taking place and, as part of Caithness Cares, Wick and Thurso High Schools, in consultation with pupils, were looking at redesigning their PSE curriculum. PSE was currently delivered by guidance teachers who were often under a tremendous amount of pressure and not able to fully deliver the curriculum they wished to. The Safe Highlander idea referred to earlier would allow guidance teachers the space they needed by bringing in experts to provide focussed sessions on a variety of topics decided by young people. This would be a more interactive and exciting way of learning and the same sessions being delivered at a number of schools would provide consistency. In relation to the development of mental health support, Anja Johnston had been actively involved with No More Lost Souls, a peer support group where people in the community could seek help. The group were not professionals but had lived experience and were willing to offer a listening ear and direct people to support services that the public were often not aware of. She was also part of the Caithness Cares group, particularly the youth sub-group, where she had provided input as a young person and helped with the development of the street work project which aimed to engage with young people and find out exactly what they wanted;
- there had been a significant increase in guidance teacher caseload during the pandemic and information was sought, and provided, as to what progress had been made in terms of increasing capacity to allow cases to be discharged and give teachers a better work-life balance as normality returned; and
- Members congratulated Anja Johnston on her appointment as Youth Convener and welcomed her involvement in important projects like Caithness Cares.

The Chair having thanked Dylan and Anja for their input, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the successful engagement and inclusion of children and young people and community partners in Caithness Cares;
- ii. **NOTED** the development of a practice model for universal mental health approaches in Caithness in tiers 1 and 2;
- iii. **NOTED** that The Highland Council would now work with partners in Caithness to create a structure that would enable the localised enhancement and re-design of services, including appropriate out of hours services as required in the local context ie create a tiered framework of service delivery and intervention from universal to targeted and legislative in Caithness ie tiers 3 and above; and

- iv. **AGREED** that the strategic 5 year development plan agreed at the February Education Committee be brought back to the Education and Health and Social Care Committees in September with details of roll out across the Highlands linked to the national recurring funding grants that would be available.

8. Virtual Academy – update and next steps **Acadamaidh Bhiortail – fios às ùr agus ath cheumannan**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/09/21 dated 10 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair highlighted that the report was divided into two sections, Section A looking at the progress and work of the Highland Virtual Academy (HVA) and how it had supported learners across Highland, and Section B looking at how things were going to develop going forward. He referred to the following quote from “A changing nation: how Scotland will thrive in a digital world”, commenting that there was no doubt that this also included education.

“Scotland’s future will be forged in a digital world. It’s a world in which data and digital technologies are transforming every element of our nation and our lives - people, place, economy and government.”

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members welcomed the report, which was hugely important for the future of education in the Highlands, particularly in smaller and more remote schools;
- in relation to the table at section 4.1.2 of the report setting out examples of courses offered, disappointment having been expressed that there was no mention of Gaelic, it was explained that Gaelic had not previously been requested by Head Teachers but it had been introduced for next session and it was hoped to increase uptake in the future. On the point being raised, it was confirmed that the asterisk related to courses that the HVA had capacity to deliver but had not been requested this year;
- there could be demand for virtual learning opportunities from both S6 pupils and adults, and information was sought, and provided, as to what focus had been given to these cohorts;
- given that one of the Council’s budget aims was to make a commercial success of the HVA, it was suggested that adult education was an area that could be expanded upon;
- further information was sought, and provided, on Google Workspace tenancies;
- in relation to Appendix 2, information was sought, and provided, on the reasons for the discrepancy in uptake across all sizes of school and what efforts were being made to encourage wider participation in what could only be an advantageous scheme for all schools;
- the HVA had huge potential and it would be helpful to hear more about how it was intended to promote it;
- there had been mention of a sixth form college approach for Advanced Highers, and it was necessary to discuss what that might look like;
- it was important to look again at the recovery angle. There was huge potential for community learning and for people to retrain and it was necessary to promote the HVA as a talent attraction concept as well;

- the report was forward looking as to how education could be delivered in a large rural local authority area in partnership with UHI, Inverness College and potentially anyone else across the world that would invest time and human resources in putting together a curriculum that was suited to Covid recovery and the 21st century;
- the number of Full Time Equivalent staff seemed very low given the number of subjects on offer;
- information was sought, and provided, on the reasons behind the drop-off in virtually every subject and how it was intended to tackle it;
- many S6 pupils were not currently moving on to tertiary education as they were uncertain what it was going to look like – ie online, blended or face-to-face learning – and it was suggested that, in conjunction with colleges, it was necessary to have additional conversations with pupils to reflect the current situation with Covid, provide relevant information and encourage them to move on to further or higher education;
- a sixth form college approach would help with transitions and would be popular; and
- where skills gaps had been identified, it was suggested that consideration be given to some form of sponsorship package to enable people who would otherwise not have the funding to retrain.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the progress made with regards attainment and achievement in the Highland Virtual Academy;
- NOTED** the plans and position for continuing to support Highland Schools;
- scrutinised and **NOTED** the progress made to support inclusion and engagement of pupils in Highland; and
- NOTED** the plans for the expansion of the Highland Virtual Academy.

9. Education and Learning Directorate Service Plan 2021/22 Plana Buidheann-stiùiridh Foghlaim agus Ionnsachaidh 2021/22

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 declared a non-financial interest as a Director of High Life Highland but, as a Council appointee and in terms of the specific exclusion in Section 5.18 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, confirmed that he would remain and take part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/10/21 dated 10 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Service Plan was the one developed for the period 2017-2022 but, due to Covid, it had been necessary to have a specific plan in place for the short term.

The Chair thanked the officers involved and welcomed the collaborative approach adopted with schools, pupils and parents;

- the Education Service had had to be particularly responsive over the last year given the ever-changing circumstances;
- whilst it was suggested that the Education Service was the most important function the Council provided, it was contested that there were many other important services such as Adult Social Care, Children Services and those services provided by the Welfare and Homelessness teams. No specific Service should be promoted above others;
- it was argued that there was little evidence in the Plan to provide assurance that change would be achieved;
- clarification was sought as to what specifically was meant by closing the attainment gap;
- the Council's performance in a recent Times newspaper national ranking of secondary schools whose pupils attained five Highers or more was disappointing and it was suggested this was a result of restricting subject choices and teaching cuts;
- Highland Council had one of the worst teacher:pupil ratios so the review of this was welcomed. However, it needed to be actioned with some urgency, especially post Covid;
- in addition to structure change there also needed to be a culture change and a change of practises. The Chair pointed out that this was a short-term plan to respond to the impact of Covid and the full Service Plan would have a change of culture at its centre;
- clarification was sought as to what was meant by "workforce plans will be developed in line with the corporate strategy";
- it was disappointing that Elected Members were not going to be given the opportunity to discuss the implementation of the directorate structure;
- referring to the Scheme of Delegation, it was argued that there was a requirement for Members to be aware of staffing restructures. Structures for senior tiers had been agreed at the Full Council the week before but it was disappointing information sought on some of the details was still awaited, though a commitment was given that this would be provided to Councillor Jarvie shortly. Further, wider consultation with Members and Parent Councils would have been beneficial and would have helped to define the difference between what was operational and what was strategic. In response, the Chair explained that Committees were tasked with "considering" significant structure issues. The main purpose of this Directorate Service Plan was to set out the key priorities and outcomes and how these were to be monitored and delivered. The report before Members was to allow them to consider the delivery of the Service Plan at a strategic level and not how it would be achieved;
- in commending the Service Plan, it was questioned how it would be evaluated to demonstrate it was on track and to evidence that it was building on the improvements already made. It was suggested that Members could be involved in the evaluation, benchmarking and the taking forward of the Service Plan;
- significant savings had made but evidence was sought as to where and what had been changed, how this had been achieved and the consequent impact of these;
- it was important to recognise however that 70% of the key performance indicators for the Service had improved. Details provided by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning in her introduction about the improvements would be circulated to all Members;

- parents, pupils, staff and associated professionals were all working incredibly hard to improve attainment across the board, particularly to address the issues caused by Covid. The advances to reduce the attainment gap were to be welcomed and, while it was important not to be complacent, the journey had begun;
- clarification was sought as to how the move towards Collaborative Teachers would differ from the current Education Improvement Team. It was recognised that there had been weaknesses in the approach in the past and, going forward, there needed to be certainty that robust discussions could be facilitated between school professionals. It was vital Head Teachers were involved in peer evaluation and support;
- clarification was once again sought as to the status of the Education Improvement Team. Their substantive posts had been filled temporarily but the uncertainty as to what was happening was unfair to all concerned and there needed to be some resolution. The Chair explained that, by reviewing the staff structure, this would be resolved and that there would be greater clarity by the time the Committee next met in August;
- reference was made to Education Scotland's Quality Indicators for school inspections and the average evaluation of Highland Schools since 2017/18. By closer engagement with Education Scotland and HM Inspectors this could be improved. Continuing, by schools using "How good is our school" as a self-evaluation tool, any areas that needed to be improved would be highlighted together with how these could be addressed. It was important that schools used this and it was robustly promoted through the Continued Professional Development programme;
- school self-evaluation had been a focus for some time and there was no reason why schools could not achieve scores of Good or Excellent. It was questioned therefore if there was enough time and resources in place to do so. Self-evaluation was an ongoing process and should be part of the School Development Planning process;
- ideally Education Scotland would give schools a period of consolidation;
- the profile of education in the future was likely to change; and
- two of the nine themes in the National Improvement Plan referred to the relationship between schools and parents and the relationship and behaviours within schools. Measuring these would require listening to children and families to ensure progress was made in these positive relationships and the method as to how to do this would need careful consideration.

Thereafter, Mr J Finlayson, seconded by Mr T Heggie, **MOVED** the recommendation.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr A Jarvie, seconded by Mr A Sinclair, moved to agree the Service Plan with the exception of paragraphs 10.7 and 10.8 on structuring with more full details of the savings to date and structure to come to Members first and then to either Education Committee or Full Council.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 13 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 2 votes, with 1 abstention, and the **MOTION** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Mr G Adam, Mrs I Campbell, Mr A Christie, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr J Finlayson, Mr L Fraser, Mr K Gowans, Mr A Graham, Mr A Henderson, Mr T Heggie, Ms E Knox, Mr G Mackenzie and Ms N Sinclair.

For the Amendment:

Mr A Jarvie and Mr A Sinclair.

Abstention:

Mr R Finlay

Decision

The Committee **APPROVED** the Education and Learning Directorate Service Plan for 2021/22.

**10. Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Update
Fios às Ùr mu Thràth-ionnsachadh is Cùram-chloinne**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/11/21 dated 29 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

After a summary of the report, Officers and the Team were commended for their excellent progress and hard work over the year on the ELC expansion programme.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the updated position regarding ELC and provision of 1140 hours;
- ii. progress towards delivering 1140 hours in all Highland settings;
- iii. the current status of ELC capital projects and work being taken forward to progress project delivery;
- iv. the work being taken forward, with partner involvement, to review funding arrangements and establish sustainable rates in line with Scottish Government guidance, with recommendations to come back to a future meeting of the Committee;
- v. the work being taken forward to support partner settings, including the administration of Scottish Government Covid-19 financial support schemes; and
- vi. the updates provided regarding ongoing discussions with Scottish Government in respect of service provision and development.

**11. St Clements Primary School Update
Fios às Ùr mu Bhun-Sgoil Naomh Chliamain**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/12/21 dated 10 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following comments were made:-

- Members welcomed the inclusion of St Clements replacement school on the agenda and conveyed positive local interest by parents and school children who supported the project;

- the long journey into developing the capital project replacement for St Clement's school in Dingwall was recognised. However, Members highlighted the urgent need to ensure parent groups were adequately supported throughout the process. Local parents were wanted to be involved in the process rather than just being consulted;
- it was queried what actions were in place to secure funding to finance the delivery of the replacement school, as concerns were expressed that some part funding opportunities might have been already been missed. It was suggested that funding might be dependent on sourcing a site in the first instance;
- reference was made to a recent parental survey which had resulted in an overwhelming majority in favour of a stand-alone school located in Dingwall. In addition, Members referred to an email from the new build sub-committee established by parents, which demonstrated the strength of feeling on the matter;
- it was hoped that the sites at Ferry Road would be strongly considered and that any technical challenges could be overcome, as it was a locally preferred location. However, all possible sites irrespective of the local development plan should be considered and planning permission could then be investigated;
- the duties placed upon Highland Council to provide suitable education for children with physical disabilities was highlighted. Members expressed there were further needs for developing additional special schools in Highland; and
- it was important to recognise that Highland Council might have made mistakes in the past regarding delivering this school project. Thanks were expressed to parents, young people, officers and Members for their continued perseverance, tolerance and understanding. The need to re-engage and re-establish the project as a priority was emphasised.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the actions being taken forward to support the development of a project for a new St Clement's School;
- ii. the positive discussions that have taken place with parents and local stakeholders; and
- iii. the expectation of further reports to this Committee and/or Full Council in the coming months.

12. Newtonmore Gaelic Medium Education - Statutory Consultation Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig Bhaile Ùr an t-Slèibh – Co-chomhairle Reachdail

There had been circulated Report No EDU/13/21 dated 16 April 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

Congratulations were expressed for the report and the level of detail in the public consultation. Credit was also given to the Head Teacher in Newtonmore for their input into the process.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation on the basis of the proposal attached to the report.

13. Statutory Consultation – Gaelic Medium Catchment Proposal for Acharacle Primary School
Co-chomhairle Reachdail – Moladh airson Sgìre-sgoile Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig airson Bun-Sgoil Àth Tharracail

There had been circulated Report No EDU/14/21 dated 10 May 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

Members welcomed the report and the further development of Gaelic in Lochaber. Tribute was also paid to former Councillor Dr Michael Foxley for his contributions towards promoting the Gaelic language in the area.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation on the basis of the proposal attached to the report.

The meeting concluded at 3.55 pm.