

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held remotely on Wednesday 17 November 2021 at 11.05 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr A Jarvie
Mr C Aitken	Ms E Knox
Mrs I Campbell	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mr S Mackie
Mr D Fraser	Mr R MacWilliam
Mr L Fraser	Mr C Munro
Mr K Gowans	Mrs F Robertson
Mr A Graham	Mr A Sinclair
Mr T Heggie (Vice Chair)	

Religious Representatives:

Ms S Lamont
Mr W Skene

Youth Convener:

Ms A Johnston

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter	Mr D Macpherson
Mr R Bremner	Mrs E McAllister
Mrs M Davidson	Mrs T Robertson
Mr A Henderson	

In attendance:

Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning
Ms K Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance
Ms A Jansson, Head of Service, Primary Education
Ms F Grant, Head of Service, Secondary Education
Mr B Porter, Head of Resources
Ms L Walker, Education Support Officer
Mr D Martin, Area Education and Learning Manager (Mid)
Mr R Quigley, Collaborative Lead/Online Safety Officer
Mr M Mitchell, Service Finance Manager, Resources and Finance
Mr R Campbell, Estate Strategy Manager, Property and Housing
Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)
Ms S Fowler, Thriving Families (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:

Dr T Allison, Director of Public Health, NHS Highland
Dr J Wares, Consultant in Public Health Medicine, NHS Highland
Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland
Mr S Harris, Chief Executive, **sportscotland**
Mr G Reid, **sportscotland**
Mr G Lindsay, **sportscotland**

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

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs M Cockburn and Mr R Finlay.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

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

Item 5 – Mr C Munro (financial and non-financial)
Item 9 – Mr A Jarvie (non-financial)
Item 10 – Mr K Gowans, Mr T Heggie and Mr A Jarvie (all non-financial)
Item 11 – Mr K Gowans and Mr A Jarvie (both non-financial)
Item 15 – Mr K Gowans (non-financial)

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

Ms L Walker, Education Support Officer, summarised the outstanding achievements by pupils and schools since the previous meeting of the Committee as set out on the This is Highland website, a link to which had been circulated to Members in advance of the Committee.

The Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

4. Covid and Back to School Covid agus Air Ais dhan Sgoil

The Chair explained that despite COVID still being prevalent in Highland, school staff and pupils supported by parents and communities continued to show resilience, flexibility and understanding of what was likely to be with the population for some time.

The Area Education and Learning Manager (Mid) gave a verbal update on COVID cases within schools, with cases initially rising in August before gently declining by September. Despite schools reopening successfully following the October break,

COVID numbers had risen again and had culminated in an infection rate exceeding 1000 over the last month. Whilst schools and classes were not generally being shut en-masse, there had been a significant rise in the number of staff contracting COVID or self-isolating pending test results. This had led to schools or classes having partial or complete shutdowns due to high case numbers or a lack of staff. Currently there were 2 primary and 2 nursery schools closed. Across Highland there were around 160 new positive cases in staff and pupils respectively, including much higher numbers still in isolation from the previous week. Whilst schools were well placed to deliver virtual learning, recognition was given to the fatigue of teaching and non-teaching staff, including head teachers who worked late into the evening for several days when outbreaks occurred.

Gratitude and thanks were expressed to NHS Highlands Health Protection Team for their continuing support and managing COVID in schools, and colleagues and other council services who work hard to support communities in keeping schools open and functioning. Much work had been done to undertake monitoring of CO2 levels within classrooms as a key measure of air quality, with monitoring to balance fresh air flow whilst maintaining heat levels in schools throughout the winter to keep schools open. Colleagues in Property and Facilities continued to work closely with schools to manage this.

Covid vaccination plans for 12-15 year olds were well in place for December and flu vaccinations were also underway. The Council's position, based on Scottish Government guidance, had been updated and the current mitigations of face-coverings, hygiene and limits to large gatherings for schools remained in place. Christmas events would be scaled back to avoid large gatherings but partners were in discussion with the service to look at alternative solutions for pantomime season.

Dr Tim Allison, Director of Public Health gave a verbal update on COVID within Highland. The increase of COVID cases trend had been more so in areas that had seen less COVID cases in the past and had now spread to all areas of Highland. NHS Highland was recording approximately 200 cases per day and remained a big issue. Whilst the proportion of people becoming seriously ill with COVID were few, there were still cases of some who became extremely seriously ill. The difference being experienced now in comparison to previous waves of COVID was the preponderance among young people. This was likely due to many young people not being vaccinated and COVID now reaching groups that it had not reached before.

Currently primary school students were the group mainly affected, with the majority of a class becoming infected when an outbreak occurred. There was a good working relationship between the Health Protection Team and Highland Council which enabled both to act quickly and pick up a larger proportion of cases, including the reasons behind the transmission of infection in order to implement further mitigation measures.

The Joint Committee for Vaccination Immunisation (JVCI) had extended its advice and now advised boosters for 40-49 year olds, but also second doses for 16-17 year olds. It was anticipated that the Scottish Government would agree to this enhancement vaccination programme.

Dr Jenny Wares, Consultant in Public Health Medicine, NHS Highland, also gave a verbal update on the close working relationship NHS had with Highland schools. When there was a single COVID case at a school, NHS were informed and a letter

was sent out to the rest of the class. There was an isolation of close contacts at that point, and advice was shared, and information provided to be vigilant for symptoms and seek testing if symptoms developed. If further cases within the same class or year group were identified, NHS undertook a risk assessment to establish if the cases could be linked, and specific advice was provided accordingly depending if the COVID infections were isolated or part of an outbreak. The incubation period of COVID from being exposed to the development of symptoms could take up to 2 weeks.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- as the COVID breakout at Avoch primary involved many pupils who travelled on small buses, a question was raised if this would be a focussed research area for NHS Highland;
- clarification was sought regarding the advice that siblings could continue to go to school despite family members being tested positive for COVID; and
- despite the pantomime being cancelled for children this year at Eden Court, it was questioned if there were possibly mitigations which would allow schools to attend the pantomime.

The Committee **NOTED** the position.

5. Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE) – The Highland Council
Aithisg Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig agus Foghlam Luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig

Declarations of Interest: Mr C Munro declared a financial interest in this item as his wife worked part-time as a Gaelic Medium teacher. He also declared a non-financial interest as his children attended Gaelic Medium Education. However, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, he concluded that his interests did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/22/21 dated 11 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- Members welcomed the inclusion of the Virtual Academy in the report for the delivery of Gaelic education and for new learners;
- it was requested that a report be brought to the next committee meeting on the role of the Virtual Academy in the promotion of Gaelic across Highland, as well as a general overview of the project;
- it was encouraging to see the figures which showed the continuing development of GME and GLE in Highland and the important part which Highland played in Gaelic Education nationally;
- reference was made to paragraph 4.3 which stated that Highland Council had the largest numbers of pupils following GLE in Scotland. Highland Council did not do this alone as numerous other stakeholders contributed;
- future development was deemed critical in the education of young people and sustaining the Gaelic language in both rural and urban Highland communities;

- an update was required on progress for the future 3-18 Gaelic offering in Inverness, including an explanation on any feasibility work which could have implications for the development of GME from 3-18 in other contexts in Highland;
- regarding the discussion paper on the development of GME in Portree High School to Highland Council in November 2019, it was queried if there was going to be an opportunity to engage with this and to seek progress;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on how the GME provision at Glen Urquhart HS could be delivered;
- the recognition that the 3-18 feasibility study might release another school provision in Inverness, providing broader education for English speaking pupils, was welcomed; and
- in anticipation of the census results, it was suggested that Highland Council undertake appropriate preparation and work on a programme for the development of Gaelic across all Highland areas.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the report and the provision of Gaelic Medium and Gaelic Education across Highland;
- NOTED** the areas of current and future development; and
- AGREED** that a report on the role of the Virtual Academy in the promotion of Gaelic across Highland, as well as a general overview of the Virtual Academy initiative, be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

6. Highland Attainment and Scrutiny Session 2020-21 Seisean Coileanadh is Sgrùdadh na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No EDU/23/21 dated 28 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- the Chair paid tribute to schools which had done really well over the last academic year, given the many difficult challenges faced. There had been some improvements in attainment over the last 4 years in terms of Highland performance but there remained room for improvement in terms of how Highland was faring with regard to its Virtual Comparator (VC) schools and national comparators, and the report outlined how it was proposed to scrutinise and improve attainment with further reports back to future Education Committees;
- the attainment overview was presented as a positive overview, claiming attainment continued to improve. Whilst this was true in some areas, key detail showed that Highland continued to perform poorly compared to its VC and very poorly compared to the national establishment against key measures;
- it was suggested that one reason for the continued poor performance was the ongoing issue with Secondary School staffing resource as Highland Council had the lowest staffing formula of all 32 Scottish local Authorities. In some of the authority's larger secondary schools, if the same staffing resource was applied, it would equate to an additional 12-14 teachers although it was doubtful if there was even the physical capacity to accommodate this with the school estate which, itself, had been left to deteriorate. The Highland Council's Corporate Plan 2017-2022 had stated that the sustainability of education provision would be

- improved by rebasing school staffing allocation to be transparent and in line with national standards but progress on achieving this was questioned;
- included in the Scottish Government's 100 days commitment priorities was funding to increase teacher numbers by 1000 and classroom assistants by 500. In addition, an extra £65m was to be provided annually from 2022-23 so local authorities could employ additional staff on permanent contracts. Highland Council's share was £2.306m to fund an additional 46 teachers and 23 full time Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs). Consequently, it was questioned (a) how many teachers and PSAs had been recruited since August 2021 outwith Devolved School Management, Additional Support for Learning, Pupil Equity Funding and Scottish Attainment Challenge funding streams; and (b) how much of the £2.306m had been allocated to schools with details of the additional teachers, PSAs and schools also sought;
- it was questioned how many PSA hours had been reduced following the Additional Support for Learning staffing allocation in October 2021;
- given the statistics it had to be questioned if the Highland Council was providing the right environment and conditions to help young people achieve their potential;
- while improvements had been made Highland Council still lagged behind the national average;
- referring to the graphs showing awards gained by young people in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile, particularly in S5, the gap had increased. Every effort needed to be made to close this gap. This was a systemic and strategic problem and a drastic course of action was required;
- Highland had one of the lowest teacher:pupil ratios, despite the number of small schools, and yet studies showed that smaller class sizes yielded better results;
- the Council could not claim to be pupil centric if pupils were unable to study the subjects they wanted;
- it was questioned how much non-contact time teachers had in other local authorities to plan lessons;
- a meaningful difference would require a new strategy. A Committee setting might not necessarily be the best forum for this and an early seminar was called for where Members and officers could examine the detail, get to the heart of the issues and arrive at the necessary conclusions;
- there needed to be an acknowledgement of where the deficits lay if they were to be addressed and, similar to what was sought from teachers, there needed to a self evaluation exercise carried out;
- there had been some improvements but these were a result of the dedication and commitment of the teaching staff who had made an exemplary job in face of diminishing resources; and
- although there had been a suggestion that the supply list was closed, Members were informed that this was not the case.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the Senior Phase Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Attainment for session 2020/21 and **NOTED** the continued positive trends in attainment over four periods;
- ii. **NOTED** that secondary school-based attainment meetings would take place in November and December 2021 and actions for improvement would be agreed; these would then be shared and discussed with Members at ward level and sessions completed by end January 2022 so that a summative report inclusive of

- Member and Headteacher feedback could be brought back to the Education Committee in February 2022;
- iii. **NOTED** the specific focus on attainment meetings on raising attainment in S5 at level 6 (Higher) and that a summary of the strategies that were being deployed across the Highlands to accelerate improvement would be brought back to the February Committee;
 - iv. **AGREED** that a report containing costed details as to how the Scottish Government funding for extra teachers and Pupil Support Assistants would be allocated in Highland be presented to the next meeting; and
 - v. **AGREED** that consideration be given to a Members' workshop/seminar on attainment.

7. Consultation on the review of SQA and Education Scotland Co-chomhairle mun ath-sgrùdadh air Ùghdarras Theisteanasan na h-Alba agus Foghlam Alba

There had been circulated Report No EDU/24/21 dated 9 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

In addition, a Members' workshop had taken place prior to the Committee to enable an initial discussion on the consultation on the Future Implementation Framework for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Review of Curriculum for Excellence, including the replacement of SQA and the Reform of Education Scotland. to take place. The Chair thanked those who had attended and explained that a draft response to the consultation would be brought to Council in December.

The Committee **NOTED** the terms of the consultation and:-

- i. the main themes and conclusions reached in the OECD reports that were being consulted on as part of the review of SQA and Education Scotland;
- ii. the proposed engagement with internal and external stakeholders to help inform the response to the consultation; and
- iii. that the draft response would be brought to full Council in December.

8. Online Internet Safety and Child Protection Sàbhailteachd Eadar-lìn Air-loidhne agus Dion Chloinne

Introducing the presentation, the Chair explained that, arising from the Child Protection Seminar on 17 September 2021, he had been of the opinion that some of the presentations from the day needed to come back to the Education Committee. Across Highland Schools, digital learning had played a significant role in ensuring that access to learning continued as smoothly and as uninterrupted as possible during the pandemic. The Council had significantly increased the number of Chromebooks that children had access to, including providing 1:1 devices for over a 100 smaller primary schools. To support this and provide reassurance to pupils, schools and families, a high emphasis was placed on providing support around digital/online safety which, it was hoped, would also be transferred to other aspects of our young peoples' digital safety.

Mr R Quigley, Collaborative Lead/Online Safety Officer, gave a presentation on progress that had been made in Highland in relation to this and outlined some of the key issues that were facing children and schools, as well as the next steps which were planned.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- there were prominent vloggers and YouTubers online who had a lot of influence over young people;
- gaming devices were also used to communicate with friends and limiting time on such devices therefore also resulted in restricting access to classmates;
- in-game purchases were a frequent feature;
- a careful balance had to be made between regulation and education in what was a dynamic and everchanging environment and partnership working with other local authorities and stakeholders was important;
- Parent Councils would benefit from hearing the presentation;
- peer to peer support and engagement would help inform discussion and there was merit in senior stage pupils taking more of a leadership role in developing strategies to protect younger children; and
- the manner in which adults and children communicated online was different and the impact on a young person's mental wellbeing could be considerable. A lot of bullying could now take place online as opposed to what used to happen in the playground.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and **AGREED** that it be circulated to Members.

9. Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Thràth-ionnsachadh is Cùram-chloinne

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/25/21 dated 8 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair highlighted that, as indicated in the report, over 4300 child places were now being accessed for provision of up to 1140 hours across Council, partner and blended placements, and he thanked all stakeholders for the positive progress that had been and continued to be made. Positive progress has also been made in relation to ongoing capital works, and a number of new or refurbished facilities had been opened since the last meeting of the Committee.

He welcomed the recommendation that the Committee agree to an interim uplift in the rate paid to partners for funded ELC places, and that the uplift be backdated to August 2021. As the report indicated, there was an ongoing process taking place around a permanent rate and he would shortly be inviting Jaci Douglas, Chief Executive, Care and Learning Alliance, who sat on the associated working group, to speak on the matter. He added that there was ongoing engagement and positive working with

partners through the working group which would lead to further recommendations coming back to the Committee in the new year.

Ms Douglas, Chief Executive, Care and Learning Alliance, commented that it was important to recognise the incredible dedication, skills and hard work of all ELC staff, particularly over the past year, who played such a vital role in supporting the early learning and development of young children and ensuring they achieved their best potential. She also expressed appreciation for the partnership approach to the delivery of 1140 hours in Highland, commissioned services being a mixture of third sector, private, local authority and childminders to provide children and parents with a quality service across the whole region.

In relation to partner rates for funded ELC, it was important to say that she sat on the Committee as a representative of third sector children's services and was not representing the views of all the partners on the working group. The working group itself was to be welcomed and it was important that the current robust, honest and respectful dialogue continued. However, she expressed disappointment at the low interim rate proposed in the report, especially considering the ask of partners of £6.50 as an interim rate as well as the predicted £266k underspend detailed in the Revenue Budget monitoring report later on the agenda.

The proposed rate, even as an interim measure, meant that partners would struggle to cover the recently announced 40p increase in the Living Wage to their lowest paid staff. Additionally, if partners were unable to offer wages that matched the higher rates paid to local authority staff it could compound current recruitment and retention challenges for the sector, and she asked if the interim rate could be reconsidered and increased, especially as it could be covered by the predicted one-off underspend.

However, she welcomed the commitment in the report to backdate the interim rate to August 2021 and to undertake the Ipsos Mori survey as soon as possible, working with partners on the shape and scope thereof. This work would be vital if a true sustainable ELC sector was to be achieved.

Whilst she appreciated it was covered in the report, she sought a commitment from the Council to also backdate any new agreed rate arising from the Ipsos Mori survey to August 2021 as if partners were not being paid the correct rate then it had been incorrect for the entire year.

Finally, she reiterated her appreciation of the partnership approach being taken and looked forward to continuing to work with partners and Council officers to ensure a thorough and transparent consultation exercise by Ipsos Mori which would provide robust data to inform the rates moving forward and ensure a thriving sustainable mixed provider sector that met the specific and unique challenges and needs of Highland communities.

In response, the Chair explained that it was not possible to ask the Committee to commit to backdating any new agreed rate arising from the review when the review had not concluded and the outcome and impact were not known.

During further discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- in relation to Kinmylies Primary Nursery, information was sought, and provided, on stage 3 of the design process. The Estate Strategy Manager undertook to keep Ward Members updated on progress going forward;
- the disparity between the rates paid to local authority and partner ELC staff appeared to be getting wider and was cause for concern;
- an update having been sought in respect of Avoch Primary Nursery, it was confirmed that the building was complete and had been handed over;
- Members welcomed the progress that had been made in respect of Milton of Leys Primary Nursery, and expressed thanks to those involved; and
- an update having been sought in relation to accommodation provision for an ELC practitioner on the Isle of Rum, the Chair confirmed that a meeting to discuss the matter was taking place that day and a member of the team would contact Councillor Henderson to advise him of the outcome.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- NOTED** the update and positive information provided in relation to the number of settings and children benefiting from funded ELC provision;
- NOTED** the current status of the remaining ELC capital projects and work being taken forward to progress project delivery;
- NOTED** the update provided in relation to local and national developments;
- NOTED** the work being taken forward in relation to the review of the rate of payment for funded ELC to the Council's partners; and
- AGREED** an interim rate for funded ELC to apply effective August 2021, as outlined in section 8 of the report.

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

Declarations of Interest:

Mr K Gowans declared a non-financial interest in this item 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 T Heggie declared a non-financial interest as a Director 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/26/21 dated 24 October 2021 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland.

The Chair explained that Steve Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland would introduce parts one and two of the report covering performance, recovery and general updates. Part three of the report, which focussed on the partnership work between

sportscotland and High Life Highland, would be introduced by Stewart Harris, Chief Executive, **sportscotland**, who had been a strong supporter of the Council for many years, **sportscotland** having made significant investments in Active Schools, Community Sports Hubs, capital investments and Sports Travel Grants amongst others. Indeed, he had been in the Highlands as recently as last month to speak with stakeholders and had visited Skye which would have confirmed for him the breadth of challenge but also the breadth of opportunity that made up living in such a large, mainly rural, local authority area. He was particularly keen to get feedback from Members in order to promote conversations around how partnership working could be improved and also how **sportscotland**, working alongside High Life Highland and other partners, could achieve strategic alignment with the Council's priorities as they continued to develop and emerge.

During discussion, the following comments were made in relation to High Life Highland recovery and general updates:-

- it was highlighted that it was the City of Inverness Area Committee, not the Council, that had requested High Life Highland to act as the managing agent of the Inverness Events and Festivals programme, which was funded by the Inverness Common Good Fund; and
- the greatly improved financial position was a credit to all involved, particularly the staff. However, cost controls had largely been achieved through the furloughing of staff and it might not be comfortable for them to hear that capital investment was a priority for High Life Highland at this stage. Information was sought, and provided, as to what reassurance would be offered to staff that management valued their contribution, and whether there were any plans to reward those members of staff who had been impacted financially during the pandemic.

The following comments were made in relation to partnership working with **sportscotland**:-

- the Chair expressed support for the proposed in-depth partnership and emphasised the need to ensure that the necessary strategic conversations took place, looking at both the Council's capital programme and its ambitious and progressive school-build agenda. He also welcomed the focus on inclusion and equality and the recognition of issues such as rural poverty, alcohol misuse and suicide, which were particularly relevant in Highland;
- Highland had been an area of great change over the past ten years and there was a huge deficit in terms of sports facility provision. Further information was sought on the discussions that had taken place so far in terms of strategic priorities and which geographical areas in Highland were considered to be key priorities. In that regard, reference was made to the Notice of Motion to the City of Inverness Area Committee on 18 November 2021 seeking agreement to begin work looking at the provision of a major new sports facility in the east of Inverness, an area which had seen significant housing development in recent years. However, it was recognised that such a facility would have to fit in with need across the whole of Highland and provide benefit for all;
- anything that brought resources to communities and stretched capital as far as possible was to be welcomed, and Members were encouraged by the proposals;
- in relation to equality, reference was made to the difference between rural and urban areas in terms of provision of and access to quality sports facilities, and the potential for smaller schools to include sports facilities for the benefit of the whole

community was welcomed. The Chair added that different parts of Highland had different pressures and needs, and what might be seen as a small investment in a city would make a huge difference in a rural area;

- appreciation was expressed for the Active Schools model which worked well in Highland, there being an Active Schools Coordinator in every Associated School Group. It was added that an Active Schools Coordinator could make a greater difference in a remote rural area than in Inverness where there might be other opportunities; and
- despite their success, having won both the Camanachd Cup and the MacTavish Cup in 2021, Kinlochshiel Shinty Club had no showers or changing facilities, and any enhancement in that regard would be appreciated.

In responding to the points raised, the Chief Executive, **sportscotland**, explained that the discussions so far around strategic priorities had been very open, looking at the options available across the whole of Highland. It was added that the discussions were preliminary pending confirmation from the Scottish Government and the National Lottery as to the financial position. It was emphasised that what was proposed was a longer-term approach, and that strategic discussions and prioritisation of projects were critical. **sportscotland** would maintain its existing commitments and would ensure that any paperwork in respect of any plans agreed upon was proportionate.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED**:-

- i. the information on the performance of High Life Highland (HLH) during the operating period 1 April to 30 September 2021;
- ii. the general updates provided in section two of the report;
- iii. that in light of the above and the restrictions which had been imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic, HLH was on target to meet the revised outcomes expected in the Service Delivery Contract with The Highland Council for the operating period to March 2022;
- iv. the positive partnership working between HLH and **sportscotland** in section 3 of the report; and
- v. the new approach to sports facilities investment being taken by **sportscotland** and its willingness to support The Highland Council's strategic priorities for sports facility development as the Council developed its capital programme.

11. Revenue Budget Monitoring for Quarter 2 of 2021/22 Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach – Cairteal 2 airson 2021/22

Declarations of Interest:

Mr K Gowans declared non-financial interests in this item, both as an employee of Inverness College/UHI and 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 interests 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/27/21 dated 28 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair welcomed the further improvement since the Quarter 1 position had been reported, much of which related to High Life Highland as described during the previous item. He added that it was necessary to be mindful of the ongoing impact of the pandemic and the risks and challenges still being faced across the service.

He went on to highlight that Mike Mitchell, Service Finance Manager, would be retiring in December and this would therefore be his final meeting of the Committee. On behalf of the Committee, the Education and Learning Service and himself as Chair of the Committee, he thanked Mike for his clear and concise advice and wished him well for his retirement.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- concern was expressed regarding the underspends on the ELC, Schools General and Specialist Additional Support Services budgets and an explanation was sought, and provided, as to why, at a time when so many budgets and services were in demand, the largest overspend was on the Service Management Team budget;
- projections were often much higher than the overspends ultimately were and the reductions were then presented as a success, but they were still overspends. However, it was necessary to be realistic and a 1.2% overspend across the entire Education and Learning budget was not considered to be unreasonable in the circumstances; and
- Members echoed the Chair's thanks and best wishes to the Service Finance Manager.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED**:-

- i. the forecast revenue position for the 2021/22 financial year, including the additional scrutiny and management action being taken and the risks and uncertainties set out within the report; and
- ii. the progress update provided in relation to budget savings delivery.

12. National Improvement Framework Annual Reporting and Education Service Plan Plana Bliadhnail Frèam-obrach Leasachaidh Nàiseanta na Gàidhealtachd 2021-22

There had been circulated Report No EDU/28/21 dated 8 November 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair explained that the National Improvement Framework (NIF) had been launched by the Scottish Government in January 2016. The Framework set out a vision for Scottish education based on achieving excellence and equity for all learners, regardless of social background and circumstances. A revised NIF and Plan were published each year in December, and the Council's response was set out in the report. The national publication set out four key priorities that everyone in Scottish education was working towards, namely:

- improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy;

- closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children;
- improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing; and
- improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people.

These priorities clearly continued to be important as the Council recovered from Covid and looked to ensure it was working collectively to improve life chances for Highland children and young people. The NIF also identified six key drivers of improvement and progress that were needed to deliver the desired improvements for learners, namely school leadership; teacher professionalism; parental engagement; assessment of children's progress; school improvement; and performance information.

The ongoing work which had continued throughout the pandemic within the Council's nurseries and schools reflected the features of the framework and, like all Local Authorities, the Council was required to produce a NIF improvement plan to demonstrate how it would work towards achieving the four main priorities stated earlier.

The Highland improvement plan outlined key actions that would be taken to address the excellence and equity agenda as well as the negative effects of Covid, particularly around health and wellbeing for all Highland children and young people. The central team continued to work with schools and communities to drive these improvements to ensure that better outcomes for young people was at the heart of everything the Council did.

The key aims within the improvement plan were building relationships, promoting empowerment and leadership and ensuring entitlement and equity. Appendix 1 of the document set out many areas of progress and success which should be celebrated. Some specific areas worth highlighting were:

- the work of the leadership and empowerment team who had been collaborating with all staff, including middle leaders and Head Teachers, to promote the empowerment agenda;
- the approach taken to establishing a whole systems approach in relation to mental health and wellbeing;
- the sector leading practice with some of Highland's most vulnerable young people through the Highland Virtual Academy; and
- the updating of safeguarding procedures that reflected 21st century society.

There was much to be proud of in the report, and the improvement plan for 2021-22 built on good practice and captured a combination of key strategic areas for improvement as well as specific elements of practice that would deliver the NIF priorities. Updates on progress would continue to be provided to the Education Committee over the next year.

During discussion, Ms S Fowler, Service Manager, Thriving Families, introduced herself to the Committee, it being her first meeting as a third sector representative. In relation to the improvement plan, she commented that there were few references to children and young people with additional support needs (ASN), who often faced multiple additional barriers to learning. She welcomed the nine-point Additional Support for Learning review being highlighted as a service priority and requested that the third sector, children, young people and families be involved in the review. With

regard to the Virtual Academy, information was sought, and provided, as to whether the “at risk” category included young people with ASN and whether the Virtual Academy was or could be part of a blended learning model for young people with ASN who were not currently in full-time education. She added that many young people with ASN had coped better with learning during lockdown, as evidenced by Highland Children and Young People’s Forum’s Letters from Lockdown project as well as feedback from families accessing Thriving Families and The Pines.

The Chair thanked Ms Fowler for her input and commented that, as agreed under item 5, more information on the Virtual Academy would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress made in Highland Council in session 2020/2021;
- ii. the key activities planned for session 2021/2022 to further improve outcomes for children, young people and families; and
- iii. the National Improvement Framework Report.

13. Statutory Consultation: Gaelic Medium Catchment Area for Glenurquhart Primary School
Co-chomhairle Reachdail: Sgìre-sgoile Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig airson Bun-Sgoil Ghlinn Urchadain

There had been circulated Report No EDU/29/21 dated 28 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

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

14. Statutory Consultation: Request to proceed to consultation on formal closure of Roy Bridge Primary School
Co-chomhairle Reachdail: Iarrtas a dhol air adhart gu co-chomhairle mu dhùnadh foirmeil Bhun-Sgoil Dhrochaid Ruaidh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/30/21 dated 15 October 2021 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

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

15. Membership of Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers
Ballrachd na Comataidh Barganachaidh Ionadail airson Thidsearan

Declaration of Interest: Mr K Gowans declared a non-financial interest in this item as a member of the Educational Institute of Scotland Union and the General Teaching Council for Scotland but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that his interests did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

The Committee **AGREED** the following change to the membership of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers:-

- Mr A Graham to replace Mr A Christie

**16. Minutes of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers
Geàrr-chunntas na Comataidh Barganachaidh Ionadail airson Thidsearan**

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting and Ordinary Meeting of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers held on 9 November 2021.

The meeting concluded at 3.10 pm.