

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 24 February 2022 at 10.35 am.

Present:

Mr G Adam	Mr K Gowans
Mr C Aitken	Mr A Graham
Mrs I Campbell	Mr G MacKenzie
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr C Munro (video conferencing)
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mr M Paterson (substitute)
Mr D Fraser	

Religious Representatives:

Mr R Finlay
Ms S Lamont
Mr W Skene

Non-Members also present:

Ms S Fanet	Mr B Lobban
------------	-------------

In attendance:

Ms D Manson, Chief Executive
Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning
Ms A Jansson, Head of Service, Primary Education
Ms F Grant, Head of Service, Secondary Education
Mr B Porter, Head of Education Resources
Mrs F Shearer, Area Education and Learning Manager (South)
Ms A MacPherson, Workforce Planning and Staffing Manager
Ms M Garson, Senior Lead Skills, Employability and Prosperity
Ms L Walker, Education Support Officer
Mr I Jackson, Education Officer, Resources
Ms L Gordon, Head Teacher, Highland Virtual Academy
Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator (video conferencing)
Miss M Murray, Committee Administrator

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

Tributes to Councillor Tom Heggie

Prior to the commencement of formal business, tributes were paid to the late Councillor Tom Heggie, Nairn Ward Member and Vice Chair of the Education Committee, who had passed away suddenly the previous day. Members spoke of his sense of humour, deep religious faith, honesty, integrity and calm, measured and “no nonsense” manner. He had

been a dedicated family man who had been also been passionate about serving his community, which he had done throughout his working life as a teacher, Minister and Councillor. He would be a loss to many and condolences were expressed to his family and friends.

Thereafter, the Committee observed a minute's silence in tribute to Mr Heggie.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Jarvie, Ms E Knox, Mr S Mackie, Mr R MacWilliam, Mrs P Munro, Mrs F Robertson, Mr A Sinclair and Ms A Johnston.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

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. School Covid Update Cunntas às Ùr air Covid do Sgoiltean

The Area Education and Learning Manager (South) provided a verbal update on the following issues:

- infection rates of Covid were declining but with occasional clusters of infection which were being managed with NHS Highland's Health Protection Team;
- the disruption to families and to children's education that was caused when classes were sent home to isolate was recognised and work was underway to reduce the times when this would be necessary;
- schools were well placed to deliver online learning as required and to support staff with measures to try to mitigate the impact of staff absences and keep schools open where possible;
- as part of the phased approach to easing mitigations in schools, the Council's position was being updated in line with national guidance reviews, while maintaining the focus on supporting wellbeing, learning and teaching;
- a summary was provided of imminent changes to regulations, which included the lifting of the requirement for secondary school pupils and teachers to wear face coverings, the lifting of restrictions on school assemblies and the relaxation of guidance on school visits; and

- positives to have emerged from lockdowns included improvements to digital learning and the creation of a virtual learning platform called HOPS: Highland's Online Primary School.

The Chair thanked all school staff and pupils for their efforts during the Covid crisis and the Committee **NOTED** the position.

5. Highland Schools Interim Review of Actions for Attainment Ath-sgrùdadh Eadar-amail air Gnìomhan airson Buileachadh do Sgoiltean na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No EDU/1/22 dated 20 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair thanked those Members who had attended the attainment workshop the previous week which he hoped had helped them to understand the attainment journey young people followed in all Highland schools and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings. The report expanded on that and showed what was being put in place to improve attainment following the discussions that took place at the previous meeting of the Committee.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- school staff, pupils and parents were thanked for their effort, commitment and achievements during the challenges presented by the Covid crisis;
- it was important that workstreams were followed through to a conclusion and Members were urged, post-election, to improve their scrutiny of the issues dealt with in the report, at Area Committees and Ward Business Meetings as well as at the Education Committee, which would in turn support their schools and local communities. Attendance at training, workshops and seminars was encouraged. The attainment report should include detail on the next steps to be taken and be recommended as a standing item for the Committee after the Council election in May 2022;
- further information was sought, and provided, on the roles of the Quality Assurance Moderation Support Officers;
- it would be helpful if the Collaborative Lead Officers could introduce themselves to Members and outline their plans;
- engagement with the Highland Mindfulness Group and other relevant third sector groups should be considered, with it being confirmed that several such collaborations were underway;
- information was sought, and provided, on efforts to tackle Highland's relatively poor position in national education league tables. Benchmarking against other local authorities with accurate data was important;
- Education leaders were thanked for their improved collaborative working with Health and Social Care and it was hoped mitigation would be sought for any challenges with developing this further;
- it was hoped any new measures reduced, rather than increased, bureaucracy in schools and in particular for teachers, to maximise time spent teaching rather than dealing with excessive paperwork; and
- it was suggested that the curriculum had narrowed as a result of the Curriculum for Excellence but attention was drawn to increases in additional areas such as digital learning and the outdoor curriculum.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the planned collaborative engagement, support and challenge provided to primary schools as outlined in the report through officer standardised attainment meetings;
- ii. **AGREED**, as a result of Primary attainment meetings, Head Teachers and officers would co-construct actions for improvement;
- iii. **NOTED** the actions resulting from the secondary school-based SQA attainment meetings in November and December 2021 which aimed to accelerate improvements in attainment across our secondary schools; and
- iv. **AGREED** to continue to seek updates on the impact of the action plans on improving educational outcomes and improvement for the children of the Highland Council.

6. Update on the Highland Virtual Academy Cunntas às Ùr mu Acadamaidh Bhiortail na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No EDU/2/22 dated 22 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- the success of the Highland Virtual Academy (HVA) was commended and assurance was sought, and provided, that all schools had the opportunity to engage with the HVA for senior level pupils. Attention was drawn to the HVA's key role during Covid and the positive feedback received from pupils and parents;
- the development of the teaching of Gaelic through the HVA was welcomed although it was disappointing there were no certified courses as yet;
- the usefulness of the HVA for language teaching in general was highlighted, citing the benefits of bi-lingualism and the enthusiasm for other cultures this promoted; and
- it was suggested the HVA could provide the Council with income generating opportunities, for example through offering out of authority learning.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the progress made with regards attainment and achievement in the Highland Virtual Academy (HVA) and the plans for continuing to support Highland schools through the HVA; and
- ii. **AGREED** consideration be given to using the Highland Virtual Academy as a means of generating income by offering services outwith Highland.

7. Presentation: Young Carers – a celebration of activities undertaken in Skye and Lochalsh

Taisbeanadh: Luchd-cùraim Òga – a' comharrachadh ghnìomhan a rinneadh anns an Eilean Sgitheanach is Loch Aillse

Mr T Breen, Head Teacher, Portree High School, and representatives of Skye and Lochalsh Young Carers gave a pre-recorded presentation during which it was explained that Skye and Lochalsh Young Carers provided support to current and former young carers in the Skye and Lochalsh area. Since its establishment in 2000

the service had supported approximately 1500 young carers and their families, and currently supported over 50 young carers. Detailed information was provided on how young carers were supported; service goals; indicators of success and how they were recorded; and how support had been provided during Covid when meeting in person had not been possible. The presentation concluded with contributions from two young carers as to how they had been supported over the past two years and how they had benefited from that support.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members welcomed the presentation and commended the young people involved. The Chair confirmed that a link to the presentation had been circulated to Members, should they wish to view it again;
- reference was made to Badenoch Young Carers which was just getting up and running. Members emphasised the need to ensure there was a consistent approach to supporting young carers across Highland and that areas that did not yet have a robust system in place learned from the expertise of areas like Skye and Lochalsh;
- young carers were an integral part of community care and support provision;
- provision like Skye and Lochalsh Young Carers demanded a lot of time in terms of fundraising;
- it having been queried whether all young carers in Highland were being supported to access Young Carer Statements, the Chair confirmed that a report in that regard had been presented to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing (HSCW) Committee, and that he, the Chair of the HSCW Committee and third sector representatives had discussed the importance of ensuring there was consistency across the authority. He added that it was not just a school issue but rather it was about all agencies working together to support young people.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

8. Ambitious Highland – My Future, My Success Gàidhealtachd Àrd-amasach

There had been circulated Report No EDU/3/22 dated 13 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members welcomed the important report and looked forward to seeing how work progressed;
- the link between Skills Development Scotland and tertiary education establishments was welcomed. Applications to tertiary education establishments had reduced significantly in recent years, probably as a direct result of Covid and the uncertainty as to whether learning would be face-to-face, blended or online, and there was a lot of work that could be done as we moved out of the pandemic to encourage people to take up courses. It was added that there had also been an increase in the number of young people who had started college courses then decided it was not for them because of the mode of delivery;
- the importance of being ambitious was emphasised;
- there were huge opportunities in Highland in terms of hydrogen, STEM subjects and growing a creative economy and it was important to align learning and

teaching with the future employment needs of the area to ensure there were quality jobs for young people which would help to retain the population;

- there was something for every young person and it was necessary to triage and direct them;
- some Members had been approached by young people looking to get into crofting/agriculture and it was queried whether that could be facilitated online;
- information was sought, and provided, as to where the funding for the plan was coming from, how much funding was required and whether regular monitoring statements would be provided;
- it was important that regular progress reports were provided in respect of the five workstreams identified;
- it was good to see that the role of the voluntary youth sector had been recognised in the report and it was queried whether, following the local government elections, an induction could be provided on third sector youth work so that Members fully understood how partners worked together to support young people. In addition, an invitation was extended to Members to attend their local youth work group and it was suggested that they get in touch with their local group directly or contact Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance. The Chair confirmed that he would pass on the request for an induction to his successor;
- it was great to see the skills for work pathway recognised in the report;
- it was asked that early years and ELC partner providers be involved in the development, roll out and usage of “talking tubs”;
- the support for apprenticeships was welcomed and a plea was made that foundation apprenticeships be promoted well in schools. Attending foundation apprenticeships gave young people the impetus and opportunity to continue to engage in school by learning valuable work and life skills; and
- opportunities were increasing in the ELC sector, particularly in rural areas, and a plea was made that ELC be included when looking at expanding education and training opportunities.

Thereafter, the Committee-

- i. **APPROVED** the detailed plan “My Future, My Success” as set out in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. **AGREED** that future reports would be brought back to the Education Committee detailing the progress made for people across the five workstreams identified.

9. Revenue Budget Monitoring for Quarter 3 of 2021/22 Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach airson Cairteal 3 de 2021/22

There had been circulated Report No EDU/4/22 dated 19 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Chair reminded Members that this report related to the current financial year and Quarter 3 forecasts, and any questions relating to next year’s budget were a matter for the full Council on 3 March. He was pleased to see that despite the ongoing challenges being faced the report showed the Quarter 3 position being stable and a slight improvement over Quarter 2 and, in particular, High Life Highland’s position improving in year. Members would also be pleased to note the update in the report regarding Scottish Government funding and staffing arrangements.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to what the Schools General and Learning and Teaching budgets comprised, and the Head of Education Resources confirmed that he would provide a more detailed response to Councillor Graham outwith the Committee;
- in relation to the First 100 Days' additional Scottish Government funding, disappointment was expressed that no details had been provided of the plans that the report indicated were in place. In addition, given that the Education Committee would not meet again until after the local government elections in May, it was requested that Members be briefed as to how this matter was developing to allow scrutiny to take place. The Workforce Planning and Staffing Manager summarised the appointments that had been made to date and undertook to provide a follow-up briefing as requested. On the point being raised, it was confirmed that the staffing formula was still in place and the appointments referred to were in addition to that, which was welcomed. Members commented that, to allow Ward Members to be more informed, it would be useful to see the staffing formula and core allocation for individual schools. In that regard, the Executive Chief Officer explained that discussions had taken place with secondary Head Teachers regarding a new staffing formula which would be presented to the full Council in June for ratification. Members emphasised the need for fairness and equity of provision across the school estate, including addressing over-staffing, as well as an element of flexibility to address situations that arose in individual schools or Associated School Groups.

Thereafter, the Committee **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.

In terms of Standing Order 9, the Committee **AGREED** to consider item 11 at this stage.

11. Statutory Consultation on Relocation of St Clements School Co-chomhairle Reachdail mu Ath-shuidheachadh Sgoil an Naoimh Cliamhainn

There had been circulated Report No EDU/6/22 dated 14 February 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- a new St Clements School was long overdue and Local Members warmly welcomed the report and the recommendation to proceed to statutory consultation;
- as stated in paragraph 4.4 of the report, a new school building would provide an opportunity to place the needs of every child at the centre of the school's design. The new school would offer good quality accommodation that provided a safe, healthy and visually stimulating environment, flexible teaching spaces, better facilities for visiting specialists, and a healthier, less stressful environment;
- it could not be overstated how much of a lift the proposal had given the town of Dingwall and the St Clements educational community; and
- thanks were expressed to the officers who had worked so hard to bring the proposal to fruition, and to Members across the Council for their consistent support and recognition of the need for St Clements School.

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

10. Statutory Consultation on Gaelic Medium Catchment Areas for Plockton Associated School Group
Co-chomhairle Reachdail mu Sgìrean-sgoile Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig airson Buidheann Sgoiltean Co-cheangailte a' Phluic

There had been circulated Report No EDU/5/22 dated 10 February 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, it was commented that these consultations were formalising what had, in some instances, existed for many years. Thanks were expressed to officers for their thorough and professional approach, their engagement with Local Members and the progress that had been made with what was a statutory obligation on the Council. In relation to the geography of Plockton Associated School Group, it was clear that Gaelic Medium provision was in one extremity of the proposed catchment area, an issue that would potentially be raised as part of the consultation process. In response, it was confirmed that if representations were received in that regard they would be considered. However, relocation would require a separate consultation. The Chair added that it was interesting to see that young people wanted to attend Gaelic Medium Education in Plockton from further afield than had previously been the case, and that it might be that expansion be sought.

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

12. Review of Statutory Consultation Exercise to Establish a Gaelic Medium Catchment Area for Newtonmore Primary School
Ath-sgrùdadh air Eacarsaich Cho-chomhairle Reachdail airson Sgìre-sgoile Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig a Stèidheachadh airson Bun-Sgoil Bhaile Ùr an t-Slèibh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/7/22 dated 12 January 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

During discussion, Local Members thanked officers for their diplomacy and the way in which meetings had been managed, particularly the change from face to face to virtual meetings at short notice.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the proposal set out within the Consultation Report (Appendix 1 of the report) and associated appendices;
- ii. **NOTED** the representations received (Appendices 3i-3iii of the report) and the report from Education Scotland (Appendices 4 and 5 of the report); and
- * iii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that it create a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Newtonmore Primary School on the basis set out at paragraph 1.2 of the report.

13. Review of Statutory Consultation Exercise to Establish a Gaelic Medium Catchment Area for Acharacle Primary School
Ath-sgrùdadh air Eacarsaich Cho-chomhairle Reachdail airson Sgìre-sgoile Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig a Stèidheachadh airson Bun-Sgoil Àth Tharracail

There had been circulated Report No EDU/8/22 dated 10 February 2022 by the Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the proposal set out within the Consultation Report (Appendix 1 of the report) and associated appendices;
- ii. **NOTED** the representations received (Appendices 3i-3xiii of the report); and the report from Education Scotland (Appendices 4 and 5 of the report); and
- * iii. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that it create a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Acharacle Primary School on the basis set out at paragraph 1.2 of the report.

At the conclusion of formal business, the Education Spokesperson for the Opposition expressed appreciation to officers for the hard work they had done in bringing reports forward to the Committee and the courteous, prompt and efficient manner in which they had responded to queries. He also thanked the Chair for his inclusive approach to chairing the Committee, as well as his humour and empathy. The Opposition had always been given the opportunity to raise issues and meet regularly with the Chair and Vice Chair, which had been important for the smooth running of the Committee.

The Chair reciprocated, thanking Members for their support and contributions during his tenure. Overall, Members had worked collaboratively and put aside any political disagreements to do the best for young people and staff in educational settings, which was the priority. He also thanked officers and school staff for their efforts during what had been a difficult time, particularly over the last two years, and Democratic Services staff for their support.

The meeting concluded at 12.55 pm.