

Agenda Item	4.
Report No	SCC/06/23

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Sutherland County Committee

Date: 16 May 2023

Report Title: The Progress of School Counselling Services in Sutherland

Report By: Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 Counselling in Scottish Schools has been available to all pupils from age 10+ since 2021. This has been fully funded by the Scottish Government and has been delivered in Highland by a range of private organisations and 3rd sector services on behalf of Highland Council. This service is delivered equitably across all Council Areas and is overseen by a Counselling Manager, who is part of a local network of support including Highland Council services, NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Private, voluntary and 3rd Sector Organisations. The Counselling Manager provides a quality assurance role and reports quarterly on the services being provided to senior managers within the Council and also to Scottish Government.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the progress to date with respect to counselling in schools.
- ii. Be aware of the very recent changes in some of the provision in schools in Sutherland.
- iii. Be aware of the wider supports in place in relation to the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people in our schools as noted in the Committee paper from September 2022 as noted below.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

The provision of counselling for all children 10+ is fully funded by the Scottish Government. There are no additional resource implications for Highland Council

3.2 Legal

There is a legal duty to meet the needs of children in relation to the Equality Act (2010) and the Additional Support for Learning (Education) (Scotland) Act 2004 and (as

amended) 2009. This legislation regards mental health as an issue that may lead to additional needs within the context of education and therefore requires the council to address these needs as presented. The provision of counselling in schools meets this need.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)

There is no cost to any child/young person or family in relation to this provision and it is available equitably across all schools. In initial Screening indicated the positive benefits of this provision. There was no necessity to undertake a full impact assessment. However ongoing evaluation of the services provided is a feature of the quality assurance undertaken by the service managers and the Highland Council officers.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever

Where appropriate, some sessions are delivered on-line, reducing the need for travel in every case. However, this has to be balanced with the need for the delivery of a person centred service, taking account of the needs of the individual pupils, who may benefit from face-to-face sessions also.

3.5 Risk

There is a risk that providing this service without it being integrated with other mental health services, could reduce the effectiveness of the networks and supports for children and young people. The Counselling Manager has therefore created a network of service providers and is part of the wider Educational Psychology Service, linking Counsellors with Educational Psychologists and Primary Mental Health Workers.

3.6 Gaelic

There are no specific implications for pupils in Gaelic Medium as this service is provided equitably across all schools in Highland. However, there is no dedicated Gaelic speaking counsellor providing a service in GME. If we set this as a criteria, there is a risk that we would not be able to fulfil this and would then be disadvantaging pupils in GME.

4. Background

4.1 The counselling service in Highland schools sits within a whole school framework, based on building positive relationships. Teachers and support staff hold early conversations with children on a daily basis, supported by counsellors for older children and by specialist staff such as Primary Mental Health Workers and Educational Psychologists, linked to all schools and early years settings. Ideally counselling should extend and augment the work of school support and be embedded within a school's culture, providing children and young people the chance to share their concerns and be heard by those skilled in this field.

4.2 School Counselling is now available in all mainstream and special in Highland schools for pupils from age 10+. This is fully funded by the Scottish Government.

4.3 Expectations of the School Counselling Service are laid out in the Highland Council '*School Counselling Guidance*' that is informed by the Scottish Government '*School Counselling in Secondary Schools*' document. Evaluation of the contract and collection of data for both local and Scottish Government purposes is completed on an ongoing basis by the Counselling Manager.

5. Access to School Counselling Services

- 5.1 Allocation of funding for school counselling is distributed annually, based on school roll.

In April 2021 Highland Council entered into a procurement process which allowed 11 service providers to become part of a framework linked to an over-arching contract with the Council through to April 2024. This allowed ALL schools in Highland to receive an equitable service.

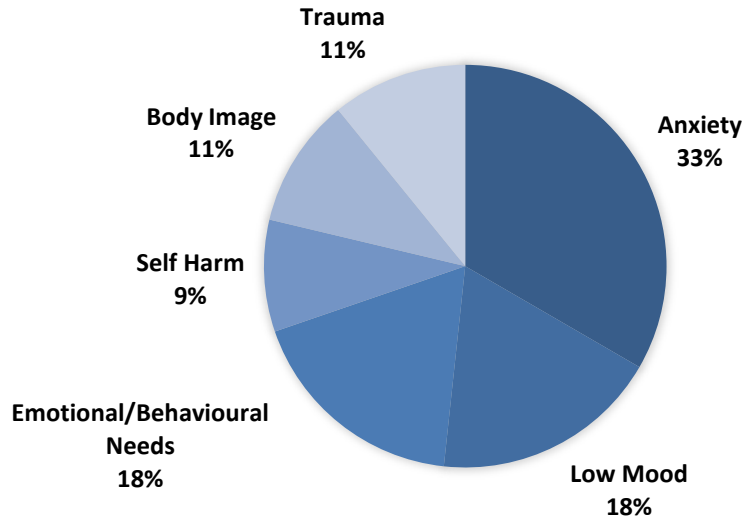
- 5.2 Due to sad and unforeseen circumstances Highland Council's largest service provider, that covered all schools in Sutherland, announced their intention to cease trading in April 2023. In response to this situation Highland Council speedily advertised and successfully recruited to Counsellor posts in order to create an in-house service. Service will therefore resume to the Sutherland schools within the next 2 weeks subject to completion of the Disclosure process.
- 5.3 The in-house service will be managed centrally within Psychological Services and will provide the advantage of allowing enhanced collaboration between professional partners through linked processes and joint training and give the opportunity for further research and development of all aspects of the School Counselling Service.
- 5.4 By working closely alongside the PMHW team the in-house service will continue to enhance a targeted and timely intervention to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people across the area.

6. School Counselling Data

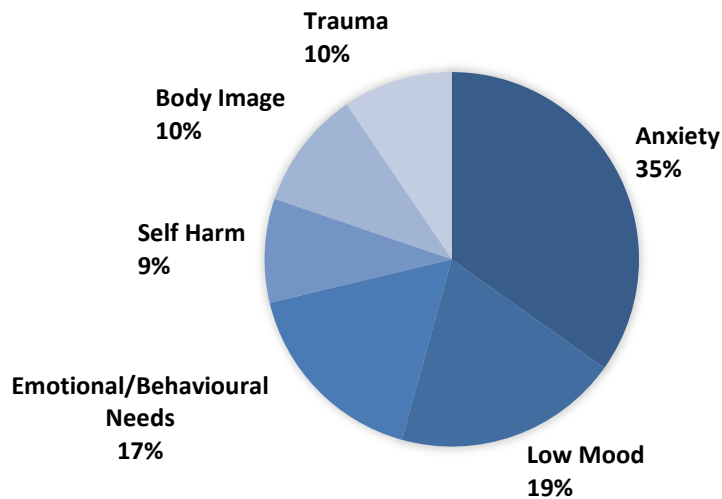
- 6.1 The Scottish Government document 'School Counselling in Secondary Schools' outlines the requirements for local authorities to provide a School Counselling Service. The Highland Council 'School Counselling Guidance' supports schools to provide an equitable service whilst allowing for a responsive approach to support different school communities. Data collection for both local and government purposes supports the development of the service.
- 6.2 Schools raise awareness of their School Counselling service through their normal modes of communication, making children and young people and parents/carers aware of the service. The confidential nature of counselling is explained, as is the individual's right to self-refer.
- 6.3 In Highland there has been a positive uptake of counselling in schools since this was provided. In large part, sessions are now delivered face-to-face, although on-line sessions are also offered and are preferred by some pupils.
- 6.4 For the period Jan 2021 – Dec 2022 approximately 115 Children and young people in the Sutherland ASGs received counselling.
- 6.5 Across Highland there is consistency in the main reasons for referral to school counselling, which aligns to the reasons for referral to other mental health services and so is not an unusual pattern. The graphs below show the percentage share of the main reasons for referral, with anxiety remaining the main concern for children and young people. These issues have shaped the content of the awareness raising training delivered by specialist services.

6.7

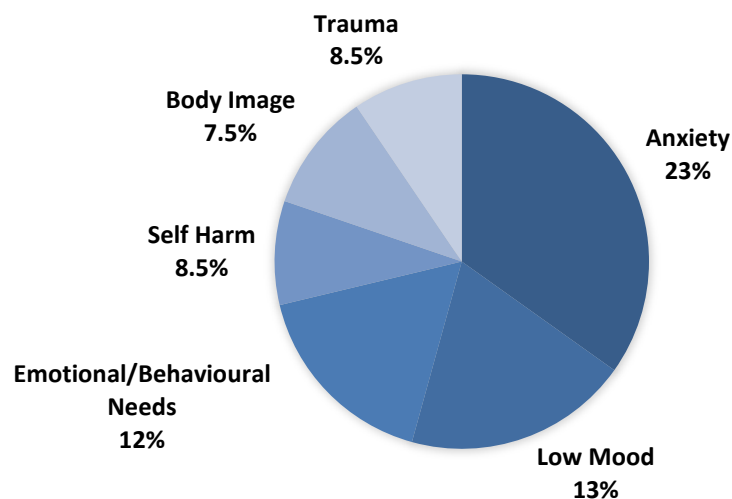
REFERRAL TO SCHOOL COUNSELLING JULY-DEC 2021



REFERRAL TO SCHOOL COUNSELLING JAN-JUNE 2022



REFERRAL TO SCHOOL COUNSELLING JULY - DEC 2022



6.8 There is a requirement for service providers to make initial contact with a referred pupil within 14 days to complete an assessment even when there is a wait list. A recent snapshot of School Counselling within ASGs indicated average waiting lists of only 6 young people per ASG. In Sutherland at this point there was a total waiting list across

all ASGs of 4 pupils. Pupils generally are able to access counselling very timely, as would be expected for an early intervention service.

- 6.9 As an additional support for children and young people, NHS Highland now also provide a fully on-line counselling and support service called [Kooth](#) . This can be completely anonymous for young people from age 10-18 and has been promoted across the pupil population over the past 6 months.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Education and Learning

Date: 2 May 2023

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Background Papers: Item 8 Education Committee, September 2022
https://www.highland.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/4668/education_committee