

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 7 September 2023 at 10.35 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Ms M Hutchison
Mrs I Campbell	Ms L Johnston
Mr A Christie	Ms L Kraft
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr P Logue (remote)
Ms S Fanet	Ms M MacCallum
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mrs I MacKenzie (remote)
Mr D Fraser (substitute)	Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)
Mr J Grafton	Mrs P Munro
Mr R Gale (substitute)	

Religious Representatives (non-voting):

Mr I MacDonald

Youth Convener (non-voting):

Ms O MacLeod

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Mrs B McAllister
Mr G MacKenzie (remote)	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Mr T MacLennan (remote)	Mr C Munro (remote)
Mr D MacPherson	

In attendance:

Ms N Grant, Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning
Ms F Grant, Head of Education, Learning and Teaching
Ms A MacPherson, Head of Resources
Ms B Brown, Senior Lead Manager, Performance and Improvement
Ms T Stones, Senior Lead Manager, Professional Learning and Development
Ms B Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist
Mr J Cook, Head Teacher, Cawdor Primary School
Ms H Flavell, Head Teacher, Thurso High School
Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

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 welcomed the new Youth Convener, Orla MacLeod, to her first meeting of the Committee. He wished Orla well in

her new role and confirmed that she would outline her action plan for the coming year at the November Committee.

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms H Crawford, Mr D Gregg, Mrs M Reid, Ms S Lamont and Mr W Skene.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithris Fhollaiseachd

There were no Declarations of Interest.

The Committee **NOTED** the following Transparency Statements:-

Item 5: Mr A Christie

Item 7: Mr A Christie

3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 29 June 2023 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Education Committee.

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

The Chair explained that, as it was so early in the new school session, schools had not been asked for achievements to date. However, a video had been produced which outlined how the targeted "Get Into Summer" funding from the Scottish Government had been used to build a range of opportunities for children and young people to have access to playful, creative, and engaging experiences during the summer holidays. The Council had received £177k which had supported 34 projects across Highland.

Education staff, working with partners, had offered a wide variety of activities which had also supported childcare and provided food for children from low-income families. The programme had seen approximately 1400 individuals attend sessions with more than 11,700 total registered attendees as some pupils had attended multiple sessions. There had been over 1100 individual youth work and play sessions on offer and 23 jobs had been created or extended in voluntary youth clubs. Additionally, approximately 11,500 meals had been provided to attendees.

Special thanks were extended to the 504 young leaders, volunteers and staff who had supported the programme.

The video was then shown which, it was explained, included activities at The Field in Alness where a full summer programme had been held. This was just one example of the great work that had taken place across Highland.

The Committee **NOTED** the update and accompanying video regarding Get Into Summer Funding.

At this stage, the Chair explained that, as part of its Youth Programme, the Council's Elections Team had held a logo design competition across Highland schools. The aim of the competition had been to encourage pupils to be creative and become curious about how democracy worked and what taking part in political elections was all about.

The new and winning logo from the competition would be used at the upcoming Community Council Elections which take place in November 2023. It would also be displayed on ballot papers, nomination forms and widely used to encourage participation in the Community Council Elections.

The winner of the logo competition was Calum Torrens of Inverness Royal Academy whose design would now be used in all branding for the Community Council Elections.

The Senior Elections Officer then presented Calum Torrens with his certificate and prize.

5. Education and Learning Service Plan – Final Plana Seirbheis Foghlaim agus Ionnsachaidh – Deireannach

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/15/23 dated 1 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to officers for the encouraging, positive and forward-looking Service Plan;
- the importance of getting it right for children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) was emphasised and it was suggested that, where the Service Vision referred to raising attainment and achievement for all, especially for children and young people from disadvantaged circumstances, specific reference be made to children with ASN;
- given that the Plan referred to lifelong learning, it would be helpful to include some targets and measures in respect of adult education;
- the only way to tackle child poverty was to tackle poverty generally, and it was suggested that page 17 of the Plan, which referred to tackling child poverty including promoting access to welfare support, be re-worded and expanded upon, and that consideration be given to what schools could do to help parents who were in poverty that would then benefit their children. In addition, it would be helpful to build in the aspect of both young and adult carers;

- information was sought, and provided, on the proposed improvements in admissions procedures for special schools and enhanced provision;
- in relation to the improvement action to establish a performance and achievement tracking system in primary schools, concern was expressed that primary teachers were going to spend a significant amount of time tracking and monitoring, and further information was sought, and provided, in that regard. The Chair added that tracking and monitoring progress was at the core of the teaching role and supporting young people; and
- the specific reference to Looked After Children was welcomed, and it was commented that when a child was in care their educational setting might be the only stability in their life. The importance of Coordinated Support Plans in terms of keeping The Promise was emphasised and clarification was sought, and provided, as to whether there was any conflict where a child had a Coordinated Support Plan and a Child's Plan at the same time.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Service Plan for 2023/24; and
- ii. **AGREED** that the points raised during discussion regarding children with Additional Support Needs, adult education, poverty, and young and adult carers would be taken into consideration.

6. Excellence and Equity Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Shàr-mhathas agus Chothromas

The Chair explained that feedback from Members had shown that sometimes the best way to understand the impact of things like Covid on schools and to better understand what was being done to both close the poverty attainment gap and improve attainment through quality learning and teaching was to hear directly from schools about what was happening on the ground and what challenges they faced, as well as what positive work was taking place and how Pupil Equity Funding was being used to support the challenges associated with delivering both Excellence and Equity.

He then welcomed James Cook, Head Teacher, Cawdor Primary School, and Hannah Flavell, Head Teacher, Thurso High School, who gave presentations detailing how Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) funding was being utilised in their schools and sharing their experiences around striving to achieve excellence, improve attainment and support equity in educational establishments.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the use of the Child Poverty Action Group toolkit and the steps being taken to tackle the costs of the school day, which could be crippling for some families, were welcomed;
- there were a lot of good initiatives taking place in schools, and information was sought, and provided, in terms of sharing best practice;
- it having been commented that the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation did not reflect rural poverty in Highland, it was confirmed that representations continued to be made to the Scottish Government in that regard;
- it was queried how the high-quality lessons being delivered in Cawdor Primary School could be replicated across the authority and what infrastructure was needed to facilitate that;

- tackling the costs of the school day addressed family poverty, as mentioned under the previous item;
- poverty was easier to identify in towns and cities than in rural areas, and it would be helpful to do some work in terms of identifying and measuring poverty across Highland. It was added that local knowledge was key in terms of identifying hidden poverty, and it was necessary to empower communities to use local knowledge, with discretion, to help families;
- inclusivity was key;
- the importance of play was emphasised and information was sought, and provided, in that regard. The Chair added that it was hoped to have a Members' Workshop on play in the future;
- the breadth of support and activity taking place and the innovative work being done to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds was impressive; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the interventions in place to secure positive destinations for young people from disadvantaged groups; whether there was a specific strategy for involving staff in implementing and evaluating the work taking place in Thurso High School; and, in relation to S6 pupils mentoring younger pupils, whether there were benefits for the S6 pupils such as accruing volunteering hours for Saltire Awards and recognition for their CVs and personal statements.

Thanks having been expressed to Mr Cook and Ms Flavell for their inspiring presentations, the Committee **NOTED** the presentations.

7. **Counselling in Schools Update** **Cunntas às Ùr mu Chomhairleachadh ann an Sgoiltean**

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item in his capacity as a Non-Executive Director of NHS Highland. However, having applied the objective test, reviewed his position in relation to the item and any personal connection, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/16/23 dated 24 July 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

The Chair commented that since Covid there had been an increased demand for counselling to support young people with the many challenges they faced, including issues with mental health. The report showed that while counselling was an important service in schools it was also just one piece of a bigger whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing that was required to support young people, families and school communities.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was sad to see the impact the Covid pandemic had had on what were now S2 pupils, which was an international issue, and it was queried whether the counselling service was helping those young people;
- information was sought, and provided as to whether trauma-informed practice was embedded in universal training for staff dealing with children and how counselling was delivered to children with language issues where a non-verbal form of communication was required;
- of the total number of young people accessing counselling in schools approximately 25-35% identified as male, and it was queried whether there was

- scope to increase that percentage as young men could be a vulnerable group in terms of mental health. It was added that when they did access counselling in school they were the most likely to recommend it so it was clearly working;
- it was queried what action was being taken to future-proof the service in the event Scottish Government funding was withdrawn;
 - information was sought, and provided, as to what could be done to reduce the causes of anxiety given that it was the main reason for referral for counselling;
 - it was queried whether there were any plans to address the fact that there were currently no Gaelic-speaking counsellors in Highland schools;
 - 70% of deaths by suicide were male, and it was important to ensure that there were no gender obstacles and that everyone who needed help sought it;
 - there was a perception by some that schools referred children for counselling when their behaviour became a problem. However, a child who needed counselling might not necessarily be disruptive and could be suffering in silence. It was queried whether this was considered to be an issue and, if so, how it could be addressed;
 - in relation to the table at section 8.2 of the report, clarification was sought, and provided, as to whether the figures represented the number of individuals accessing the service or the number of contacts. In addition, information was sought, and provided, on the average number of interactions with a counsellor and the number of onward referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and the Neuro Developmental Assessment Service;
 - on the point being raised, the Chair undertook to have a further update on Counselling in Schools at the Committee in May/June 2024;
 - it was queried whether pupils in small rural schools, where it was more difficult to be anonymous, were less likely to come forward and, if so, how that could be addressed;
 - officers were commended for implementing an in-house counselling service so quickly and providing continuity where possible;
 - the use of Kooth to provide online counselling and support was welcomed;
 - having counselling in schools normalised seeking help for mental health issues and reduced stigma; and
 - the Chief Executive, Care and Learning Alliance, spoke to the importance of gender equity and providing gender-equal play, and undertook to share an e-learning module in that regard with Members of the Committee; and
 - it was good to have a debate on what had, in the past, been a taboo subject.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress made on embedding a school counselling service across Highland and the data gathered to date in relation to this service;
- ii. **NOTED** that counselling was one part of the available supports for promoting positive mental health and emotional wellbeing across Highland;
- iii. **NOTED** the training available in relation to Promoting Positive Relationships, Mental Health Awareness and Becoming Trauma Informed and **AGREED** to signpost this as appropriate to schools and services within communities;
- iv. **NOTED** and **AGREED** to promote the use of the website created for parents/carers, pupils and practitioners in Highland to support mental health and wellbeing: <https://www.wellbeinghighland.co.uk/> and;
- v. **AGREED** that a further update on Counselling in Schools be presented to the Committee in May/June 2024.

8. National Discussion and Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment Deasbad Nàiseanta agus Ath-sgrùdadh Neo-eisimeileach air Teisteanasan is Measadh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/17/23 dated 1 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

The Chair commented that it was often said that education was an area of continual change. However, because society was changing so quickly it was necessary to continually review what learning, teaching and assessment looked like and ask if they were fit for purpose in a world where the profile of employment for the future would look so different from what it was today and where every young person deserved the chance to achieve and have their successes at every level acknowledged.

As Members would be aware, two main consultations had taken place in recent times and, following the recent successful workshop about current qualifications, the report provided an opportunity to hear about and discuss some of the proposals that had been put forward for the future as part of The National Discussion on Education and the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised in respect of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment:-

- concern was expressed that the suggested form of assessment could lead to instances of pupils leaving school after S4 with no qualifications;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that Highers and Advanced Highers would continue and National 5 certificates would be internally assessed;
- National 5s being internally assessed could reduce the confidence of employers in these qualifications and would lead to pupils sitting Highers and Advanced Highers with no prior experience of externally assessed exams;
- Scotland was going in a different direction regarding qualifications than the rest of the UK which could lead to confusion for employers and universities;
- exams could be intimidating to some young people causing them not to do well, and the importance of having an inclusive education system was emphasised;
- the reference to lifelong learning was welcomed; and
- the need for further consultation and teacher engagement having been emphasised, it was explained that teachers would be given the opportunity to consider and provide feedback on the recommendations at the forthcoming inset day.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the update report on education reform in Scotland; and
- ii. **APPROVED** the actions set out as Next Steps in section 7 of the report to support engagement opportunities of our teachers with the information set out in the National Reports.

9. Revenue Budget Monitoring Final Out-turn 2022/23 and Service Performance Reporting for Quarter 1 – 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023
Fior Shuim Dheireannach Sgrùdadh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach 2022/23 agus Aithris Coileanaidh Seirbheis airson Cairteal 1 – 1 Giblean 2023 gu 30 Ògmhios 2023

There had been circulated Report No EDU/18/23 dated 11 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a question, the Chair explained that any underspend due to industrial action by teaching staff would be used across the Education Service and the Council generally;
- following concerns being raised around the poor condition of Inverness High School, the Chair commented that there had been significant investment in Inverness High School and officers from both Housing and Property and Education had visited the school. He reminded Members that the Capital Programme Review would be considered at the next meeting of the Full Council;
- the Devolved School Management Scheme disadvantaged schools in older buildings, and it was queried whether the review of the Scheme was ongoing and whether Members would have an opportunity for input; and
- it would make sense, from an educational needs perspective, for the Education and Learning Capital Programme to be reported to the Education Committee for scrutiny and monitoring purposes, as had taken place historically, rather than the Housing and Property Committee. The Chair undertook to investigate this and report back.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Service's revenue monitoring position; and
- ii. scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service's performance and risk information.

10. Statutory Consultation: Gergask Primary School – Proposal to Proceed to Consultation on Closure
Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Bun-Sgoil Gharbhghaisg – Moladh a Dhol air Adhart gu Co-chomhairleachadh a Thaobh Dùnadh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/19/23 dated 1 August 2023 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.

11. Review of Statutory Consultation Exercise – Closure of Struan Primary School
Ath-sgrùdadh air Eacarsaich Cho-chomhairleachaidh Reachdail – Dùnadh Bun-Sgoil an t-Sruthain

There had been circulated Report No EDU/20/23 dated 23 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

During discussion, Local Members made the following points:-

- Struan Community Council was fully supportive of the closure of the school and should be commended for their hard work to keep the school building in good condition; and
- it made sense for the catchment area to be transferred to that of Dunvegan Primary School.

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that it discontinue education provision at Struan Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Dunvegan Primary School. Struan Primary had not been operational since 2022 and a closure decision would formalise the current operational situation.

12. Review of Statutory Consultation Exercise – Closure of Torridon Primary School Ath-sgrùdadh air Eacarsaich Cho-chomhairleachaidh Reachdail – Dùnadh Bun- Sgoil Thoirbheartan

There had been circulated Report No EDU/21/23 dated 23 August 2023 by the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning.

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that it discontinue education provision at Torridon Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Shieldaig Primary School. Torridon Primary School had not been operational since 2012 and a closure decision would formalise the current operational situation.

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

The draft Minutes of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers held on 13 June 2023 had been circulated and were **NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 12.50 pm.