

# The Highland Council

Agenda Item	11.
Report No	EDU/12/24

**Committee:** Education

**Date:** 30 May 2024

**Report Title:** Counselling in Schools Update

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive - People

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Counselling is available in all Highland schools for children aged 10+. This service is part of a Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing that covers the continuum from developing positive relationships and a positive culture, through to developing trauma informed practices in our schools and early learning and childcare settings.
- 1.2 For most children, families and staff, prevention and signposting of self-help materials is a sufficient level of support to meet their wellbeing needs. To support children/young people, parents/carers and practitioners, a website has been created to enable a central space for support materials and to provide ease of access for information, resources, and training <https://www.wellbeinghighland.co.uk/>.
- 1.3 However, for some, direct intervention, either from school staff, community-based partners or specialist services, is also required, especially where trauma and adversity has impacted on mental health and emotional wellbeing. This report provides an update specifically on the progress of one of these services, Counselling in Schools.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
  - i. Note the updated information on school counselling in Highland schools.
  - ii. Note the training available in relation to Promoting Positive Relationships, Mental Health Awareness and Becoming Trauma Informed which can be signposted as appropriate to schools and services within communities.

## 3. Implications

### 3.1 Resource

This Counselling in Schools service has been fully funded by the Scottish Government since 2021, with an annual commitment of £1.018m.

### 3.2 Legal

- Health and Wellbeing is one of the three main strands of Curriculum for Excellence and as such there is a duty on all local authorities in Scotland to address this area of work across the curriculum in all schools.
- The Education (ASL) (Scotland) Act 2004 and 2009 requires the Local Authority to identify, provide for and review the additional support required by children and young people who have health and wellbeing needs (including mental health needs).
- The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 stresses the importance of everyone involved with a child taking responsibility for their wellbeing, and ensuring they work together to enable the child to reach their full potential.
- The Equality Act 2010 requires all local authorities to support those staff members and school pupils who have disabilities (including mental health difficulties).

### 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)

It is acknowledged that many children from 'vulnerable' groups are over-represented in those who have mental health difficulties. This includes children, families and staff living in SIMD 1+2, those who identify as LGBTIQ, those with a disability and those who are known to have experienced previous adversity. Tracking the access to counselling for these groups is therefore important.

This service takes a trauma informed approach, as it is known that this can have positive community, poverty, and equality implications by reducing the impact of trauma on those individuals and groups more at risk of experiencing adversity and enabling individuals to be better supported.

In relation to children's rights, an impact assessment has shown that this service has a positive impact on children and young people with the following articles being of particular note:

- Article 6 – All children have the right of life. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily.
- Article 12 All children have the right to express their views and have these taken into account in matters affecting them.
- Article 19 – Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for, and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.
- Article 24 – Children have the right to good quality healthcare and to clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment so that they will stay healthy.
- Article 28 Every child has the right to an education.

### 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever

There are no identified implications except that some training can be (and is being) delivered remotely as a means of providing continued staff development, which reduces or negates the need to drive to venues.

### 3.5 Risk

The counselling service directly supports the mental health of children and young people at an early stage, reducing the risk of escalating mental health difficulties.

### 3.6 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)

There are no specific health and safety risks. This service aims to support the mental health of children and young people and reduce risk. Staff who deliver the service all receive clinical supervision to support their own wellbeing.

### 3.7 **Gaelic**

There are no specific implications for Gaelic learners. Counselling is available, where appropriate, to all pupils age 10+ in Highland Schools. There are however no designated Gaelic speaking counsellors, and all services are provided through the medium of English.

## 4. **Background**

4.1 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 is delivered in Highland by a range of in-house counsellors, private organisations, and 3<sup>rd</sup> sector services on behalf of Highland Council. This service is delivered equitably across all Council areas and is overseen by a Counselling Manager. The Counselling Manager provides a quality assurance role and reports quarterly on the services being provided to senior managers within the Council and to Scottish Government.

4.2 Counselling can be beneficial to many children and young people, however preventative curricular approaches and other early interventions such as programmes to reduce anxiety, social skills teaching and approaches to improving a school's emotional climate can have a greater overall effect (Rickard et al., 2023<sup>i</sup>). These approaches are therefore also part of the Whole School Approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing.

4.3 Counselling is one part of a whole school approach, supported by the range of Highland Council Psychological Services as recommended within the Personal Social Education (PSE) review (Scottish Government, 2019<sup>ii</sup>). The PSE review found that:

'There was strong agreement on the importance of school counselling in delivering effective support to young people, however, this is within a wide spectrum of mental HWB support. School counselling should not be seen as the only effective delivery mechanism to support young people; existing approaches already being delivered by schools, such as nurture, should be complemented by a school counselling service.'

## 5. **Guidance and Governance**

5.1 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.

5.2 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.

5.3 As service providers continue to deliver services in several of our ASGs, ongoing evaluation of their contract with Highland Council has enabled discussion around enhanced consistency of approach to school counselling services across Highland.

## **6. Service Delivery**

- 6.1 The School Counselling Service is currently delivered by a team of 7 in-house counsellors providing a service to 15 ASGs. Service providers are contracted by the other ASGs from the framework, established in 2021.
- 6.2 The development of the team of in-house counsellors has allowed for the collection of data in addition to that reported to the Scottish Government. This data is informing the strategic development of the service. Analysis of the use of the service by CYP in relation to attendance patterns, accessibility and waiting times is helping to support systems that optimise the capacity of the service. The online referral system that has been established both monitors progress of children and young people and enhances communication between school and counsellor. Tracking the access to counselling for those most vulnerable can therefore be more closely monitored.
- 6.3 The initial framework of contracted service providers expires in April 2025. The first steps in a re-procurement process are underway to create a new framework contract going forward. The data gathered and experience of the previous contract have demonstrated the need for change within some areas of the service to provide efficiency, value for money and ease of contract monitoring. Consultation will take place with existing providers and schools in relation to changes to the previous contract focussing on accessibility and equity of the service across Highland. It is anticipated that by November 2024 potential service providers will be invited to tender for a place on the new framework.
- 6.4 The in-house service is managed centrally within Psychological Services. This has been extremely helpful in gaining direct feedback from counsellors and young people to explore areas for change in the new procurement contract. Enhanced collaboration between professional partners through linked processes and joint training remains on the agenda. By working closely alongside the Primary Mental Health Worker 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 Highland.

## **7 Training**

- 7.1 To support the direct delivery of counselling to pupils, awareness training has also been provided to PSAs and teachers relating to all areas of mental health and wellbeing. This has been delivered by the Counselling Manager, Educational Psychologists and Primary Mental Health Workers. It has targeted areas that children and young people have presented to the counselling service, to support a greater awareness and understanding in schools.
- 7.2 As an example of the training offered, to date, 368 PSAs have accessed a modular training course comprising 4 x 2 hour training sessions, addressing many of the issues that lead to mental health difficulties for children and young people as noted below. In those key modules relating to an understanding of Worry and Anxiety, Adversity and Trauma, an average of 81% of participants report a 2-point increase in their knowledge, as measured on a 10-point scale after the training sessions. Anecdotally they report this training has had a positive impact on their practice and educational psychologists are planning focus group interviews to gather more qualitative data to identify the specific impacts on individual practice.

## 8 School Counselling Data

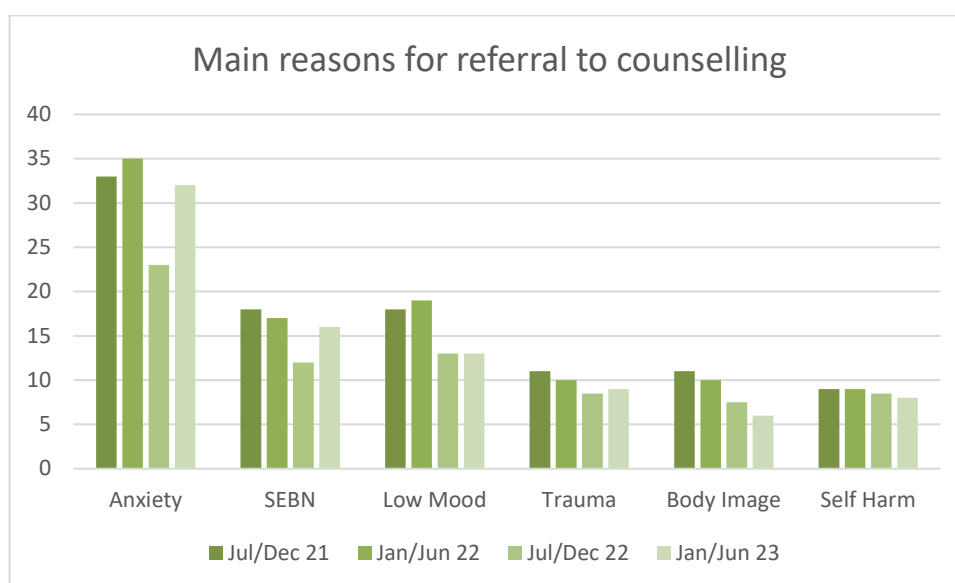
8.1 In Highland there continues to be a positive uptake of counselling in schools, with an average of 1512 individual children accessing counselling over the course of a year. In large part, sessions are now delivered face-to-face, although on-line sessions are also offered and are preferred by some pupils.

8.2

	Jan/Jun 2021	Jul/Dec 2021	Jan/Jun 2022	Jul/Dec 2022	Jan/Jun 2023	Jul/Dec 2023	Ave.
No. accessing counselling	797	702	879	743	767	648	756
No. identifying as female	520	442	583	497	517	424	497
No. identifying as male	277	220	264	213	207	199	230
No. identifying as non-binary/other	Data not gathered	40	32	33	43	25	35
No. accessing in-person sessions	489	627	746	678	694	681	653
No. accessing on-line sessions	440	459	494	104	207	84	298
Number in P6	90	45	74	27	47	42	54
Number in P7	91	76	111	75	68	60	80
Number in S1	105	102	76	66	85	66	83
Number in S2	127	104	139	101	138	114	121
Number in S3	119	118	158	134	127	124	130
Number in S4	95	102	155	162	146	105	128
Number in S5	131	95	91	99	95	81	99
Number in S6	39	60	75	79	61	56	62

8.3 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 graph below shows 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.

8.4



SEBN – social, emotional, and behavioural needs

8.5 Counselling is an early intervention service and generally pupils are seen without delay. A recent snapshot of School Counselling within Associated School Groups (ASGs) demonstrated average waiting lists of 6 young people per ASG, which is considered an acceptable level given the turnover of pupils entering the service. There is however a

requirement for both service providers and in-house counsellors to make initial contact with any pupil referred, within 14 days, to complete an assessment of their needs. This ensures that any pupil with significant needs can be referred on to other services quickly, should they require a more specialist intervention. For those pupils who have a short wait, guidance support, self-help materials and on-line counselling are also available to them.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 9 May 2024

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Background Papers:

Previous committee reports on this service provide more detail of the context of the Whole School Approach to supporting mental health in schools.

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<sup>i</sup> Rickard, N., S., Chin, T-C, Cross, D, Hattie, J. & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2023) Effects of a positive education programme on secondary school students' mental health and wellbeing; challenges of the school context, *Oxford Review of Education*, DOI: [10.1080/03054985.2023.2211254](https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2023.2211254)

<sup>ii</sup> Scottish Government (2019). Review of Personal and Social Education: preparing Scotland's children and young people for learning, work, and life. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/review-personal-social-education-preparing-scotlands-children-young-people-learning-work-life/>