

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 30 May 2024 at 10.35 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Mrs I Campbell (remote)	Ms L Kraft
Mrs M Cockburn	Ms M MacCallum (remote)
Ms H Crawford	Mrs I MacKenzie
Ms S Fanet	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)
Mr R Gale	Mrs P Munro (remote)
Mr J Grafton	Ms M Ross
Mr D Gregg	

Religious Representatives (non-voting):

Ms S Lamont
Mr I MacDonald

Youth Convener (non-voting):

Ms O MacLeod

Non-Members also present:

Mr M Baird (remote)	Mrs M Paterson (remote)
Mr B Lobban (remote)	Mrs M Reid
Mr G MacKenzie (remote)	Mrs T Robertson (remote)

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People
Ms F Grant, Head of Education, Learning and Teaching
Ms C Macklin, Head of Education, Lifelong Learning and Gaelic Services
Ms A MacPherson, Head of Resources
Ms B Brown, Senior Lead Manager, Performance and Improvement
Ms T Mackie, Senior Lead Manager, Additional Support for Learning
Ms T Stones, Senior Lead Manager, Professional Learning
Ms H Brown, Senior Manager Early Years
Ms F Shearer, Area Education and Learning Manager (South)
Ms M Garson, Senior Lead, Employability and Skills 3-18
Ms B Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist
Mr I Jackson, Education Officer
Ms F Jamieson, Collaborative Lead Officer
Ms E Ross, Quality Assurance Moderation Support Officer
Ms J Kean, Head Teacher, Merkinch Primary School
Ms R MacCormick, Head Teacher, Dalneigh Primary School
Mr R Campbell, Service Lead – Capital Planning and Estate Strategy
Mr S Dalgarno, Development Plans Manager
Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)
Ms S Fowler, Thriving Families (Third Sector)
Ms M Chemonges, Highland Parent Council Partnership
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Ms R Holt, Chief Executive, Eden Court

Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland

Ms H MacLeod, Community Learning and Development Support Officer, High Life Highland

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Macpherson and Mr W Skene.

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

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

Item 4: Ms S Atkin

Item 6: Ms L Johnston and Mr D Millar

Item 10: Ms S Atkin

Mr J McGillivray made a general Transparency Statement on the basis that he was still registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, and as a retired member and former Highland District Secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association.

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

A presentation on outstanding achievements by pupils and schools had been circulated to Members in advance of the meeting. To formally recognise the outstanding achievements at the Committee the presentation was shown.

The Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

**4. Positive Destinations
Cinn-uidhe Mhatha**

Transparency Statement: Ms S Atkin declared a connection to this item as a My Future My Success Mentor but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/7/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the report was about the progress that had been made in improving positive destinations for all school leavers as well as the work being done to support the most vulnerable young people through work-related learning and mentoring.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the positive and encouraging report;
- the uptake in work experience was welcomed. It was added that it would be good to see every young person in Highland undergo work experience as it made a big difference to confidence amongst other things;
- with reference to the number of young people in Highland that went into employment compared with the national position, it would be helpful to break down the statistics and provide the context behind them so Members had a clear picture of the choices young people in Highland were making;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that a more detailed breakdown of the approximately 4% of young people that were not going on to a positive destination could be provided in future reports;
- it was important to reflect on the multi-agency work that went into producing the statistics in the report and the aims and ambitions going forward;
- in relation to the Healthcare Pathway Pilot, the fact that 84% of the cohort intended to go on to a healthcare profession was significant and it was questioned how that success could be built upon going forward;
- the range of opportunities in terms of apprenticeships and further education was welcomed, and it was good to see so many employers offering work experience;
- the positive impact of the My Future My Success program was recognised;
- it having been queried whether a follow-up survey of school leavers could be carried out in 12 months' time, it was explained that this sat with Skills Development Scotland and was recorded in the Participation Measure. The Senior Lead, Employability and Skills, undertook to provide further information in that regard to Mr R Gale;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether all local authorities classed 16 hours per week as full-time employment in relation to positive destinations, and why 16 hours had been chosen; the willingness of businesses to offer work experience placements and whether there was strong representation across Highland; and whether there was a way of tracking and engaging with young people who had left school early, for example, and signposting them to advice and support. In relation to signposting, the Senior Lead, Employability and Skills, undertook to share a link to the Highland Employability Service, which was a self-referral process, with Committee Members.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the content of the report and the progress made in improving positive destinations for all; and
- ii. the work developed to support the most vulnerable young people to secure positive destinations through work-related learning and My Future, My Success.

5. Curriculum for Excellence Assessment and Moderation Measadh agus Measarrachd a' Churraicealaim airson Sàr-mhathais

The Chair explained that, as promised at the previous meeting of the Committee, a presentation would be provided which it was hoped would help Members understand how moderation and assessment worked, whilst also improving understanding of Curriculum for Excellence and the roles of teachers, schools, Associated School Groups (ASG) and service staff in ensuring support and challenge were built into the processes that took place in the many diverse school settings in Highland.

He then handed over to Fiona Jamieson, Collaborative Lead Officer, Emily Ross, Quality Assurance Moderation Support Officer, Jillian Kean, Head Teacher, Merkinch Primary School, and Rhona MacCormick, Head Teacher, Dalneigh Primary School, who gave a detailed presentation as described.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the thorough presentation, which the Chair confirmed would be circulated to Members of the Committee;
- the provision of support for teachers was welcomed, as was the focus on learning and teaching and pupils' strengths, and the Highland Assessment and Moderation Toolkit was commended; and
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including the accessibility of the Central Moderation Program and the two Moderation Collaborative modules referred to; whether there were checks in place to ensure that high-achieving pupils were working within their capacity and were not at risk of burnout; which elements of the work described were compulsory; whether the Assessment and Moderation Toolkit was designed to minimise bureaucracy; whether any Highland-specific challenges had been identified in terms of ensuring consistency; how the timing of assessment affected consistency; where probationer teachers were in terms of their knowledge of assessment and moderation, and whether they saw the approach in Highland as innovative and supportive; and whether it was expected that every primary school would have an element of assessment and moderation as part of their school development plan.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

6. Young Carers Statement and Strategy 2024-2026, Education and Learning Aithris agus Ro-innleachd Luchd-cùraim Òga 2024–2026, Foghlam agus Ionnsachadh

Transparency Statements: the following Members declared connections to this item but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Ms L Johnston, as an employee of Connecting Carers within the adult carer service

Mr D Millar, as a family member worked for Skye and Lochalsh Young Carers

There had been circulated Report No EDU/8/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the encouraging report, and Members welcomed the Young Carers Strategy and the engagement that had taken place with Young Carers organisations in that regard;
- feedback from Young Carers organisations was that sometimes schools were not the best place to prepare Young Carers statements as Young Carers might not wish to disclose current stresses and struggles to teachers. In addition, it was questioned whether schools would have the capacity to meet the needs of Young Carers and review and update Young Carers Statements. It was therefore proposed that, where a Young Carer was working with a Young Carers organisation, they be given the opportunity to have their statement prepared with the support of that organisation rather than with the school if they so wished. This was accepted, subject to there being no resource or legislative implications;
- concern was expressed about overloading the system, and it was necessary to differentiate between the role of schools and the wider services involved in supporting young people with significant caring roles;
- the Chief Officer, Thriving Families, welcomed the development of a Young Carers Statement as a first step, and that it was in a format that reflected the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. She also welcomed the inclusion of the third sector in the Young Carers Improvement Group and looked forward to seeing the Young Carers Strategy come to fruition; and
- it was highlighted that 10 to 16 June was Carers Week, the theme for which was "Putting carers on the map";
- the number of Young Carers in Highland was potentially huge given the number of young people who, for example, looked after a sibling with Additional Support Needs (ASN), a parent with a disability or addiction issue or a grandparent with dementia;
- Young Carers were amazing young people who gave up major parts of their childhood, including time to access education and study, because of the sacrifice they made to look after family members;
- the right to a Young Carers Statement was enshrined in law, and it was welcomed that information in respect of Young Carers would no longer just be held in a Child's Plan or on SEEMiS, and that Young Carers would have ownership and direction over their Young Carers Statement;
- it was emphasised that Young Carers and Care Experienced Young People were two very different things, and The Promise was made to all Care Experienced Young People in Scotland; and
- support for Young Carers was an ongoing journey and required a multi-agency collaborative approach, and Members looked forward to updates on progress at future meetings.

The Committee:-

- i. recognised and **NOTED** the progress made by Education and Learning with regards the enhanced support for Young Carers;
- ii. **AGREED** the Young Carers Strategy and Statement for Education and Learning; and
- iii. **AGREED**, subject to there being no resource or legislative implications, that where a Young Carer was working with a Young Carers organisation, they be given the opportunity to have their statement prepared with the support of that organisation rather than with the school if they so wished.

7. School Roll Forecasts and Capacity Modelling Ro-mheasaidhean Chlàran Sgoile

There had been circulated Report No EDU/9/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the report provided the most accurate 15-year school roll projections the Council had ever been able to produce, which would clearly feed into all the services the Council provided as it allowed a consistent approach to capacity modelling for all educational settings to be established. It also fed into the Highland Investment Plan, and he was sure Members would find the presentation accompanying the report interesting and informative.

The Service Lead – Capital Planning and Estate Strategy, and the Development Plans Manager then gave a presentation in amplification of the report, including information on the Housing Land Audit and the impact of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed for the significant amount of work that had been undertaken in terms of school roll forecasting and capacity modelling;
- the comments regarding developer contributions were welcomed, and information was sought, and provided, regarding the use of developer contributions and how Members could interact directly with the Developer Contributions Action Group;
- concern was expressed regarding depopulation and low school roll numbers in areas such as North Wester Ross, North West Sutherland and the Dornoch Firth, which were outwith the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport area, and it was commented that it was necessary to look beyond the school roll numbers in such areas;
- the need for a more age-friendly housing strategy for Highland was emphasised;
- it was queried whether developments that might lead to an influx of people to a particular area in the future, such as the new Belford Hospital development which was currently on hold, were taken into account;
- as southern areas became hotter due to climate change, there was a slow trend of people moving north, and Scotland was becoming increasingly attractive. Plans in terms of climate change and coastal erosion were looking as far forward as 2050, and it was queried whether the Council was looking that far forward and taking such matters into consideration in school roll forecasts;
- in relation to school capacity modelling, it was queried whether consideration was given to the role of private and third sector Early Learning and Childcare providers;
- housing development in a particular area did not always lead to the school roll increasing; it was dependent on the tenure of the housing;
- forecasting was useful but a lot could change, and the Council could make a lot happen in terms of how it planned for the future; and
- there was a perception that there was no demand for housing in some areas as families seeking to move there had not put their names on the housing register; and
- the improved accuracy of school roll forecasts was welcomed, and it was reassuring that they were reviewed annually.

The Committee **NOTED** the updated 15-year School Roll Forecasts and the recent work to establish a consistent approach to capacity modelling for all types of schools.

8. Service Performance Monitoring Report for Quarter 4 – 1 January 2024 to 31 March 2024

Aithris Coileanaidh Seirbheis – 1 Faoilleach 2024 gu 31 Màrt 2024

There had been circulated Report No EDU/10/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the Service performance and risk information; and
- ii. **AGREED** the suggested change to the planned target in respect of the High Life Highland Contract review, as set out in paragraph 5.2 of the report.

9. High Life Highland Progress Report

Aithisg Adhartais High Life na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No EDU/11/24 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland (HLH).

The Chair reminded Members that, in November 2023, as well as presenting the Community Sports and Leisure Facility Strategy, the six-monthly High Life Highland report had focussed on the impact High Life Highland had had on the health and wellbeing of communities in Highland. This time, in addition to reporting on the usual Key Performance Indicators and detailing how High Life Highland contributed to the Council's Corporate Plan, the report focussed on how the partnership between the Council and High Life Highland had facilitated consistent growth in charitable, trading, grant and partnership income since the Council had created its Arm's Length External Organisation in 2011. He was sure Members would view all of this as a good example of how partnership working, based on the foundations of trust and positive relationships, could deliver excellent outcomes.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the comprehensive report, which built on the promising work in previous reports. It was clear things were progressing in the right direction, and thanks were expressed to the Chief Executive and his team for their efforts and for making High Life Highland a flagship organisation;
- in addition to the good news in Appendix 2 of the report, it was highlighted that Inverness Harriers, who were hosted by High Life Highland at Queens Park Athletics Stadium, had produced an Olympian, Megan Keith, and Members wished her the best of luck at the Paris Olympics;
- Members spoke to the success of High Life Highland since its inception. Music Tuition, for example, had been under threat in the past due to budgetary constraints, but was now delivered by High Life Highland to hundreds of children throughout the Council area;
- it was encouraging that volunteer recovery was at 80% of pre-Covid levels;
- it was queried how Active Schools Coordinators ensured there was equity between smaller and larger schools;

- the arts was somewhat neglected in schools, and it would be good to see parity with sports as drama had as much to offer in terms of benefits to mental health and developing character and resilience; and
- Members commended the Young Persons' Leadership Programme and the work High Life Highland did in relation to the My Future My Success project and to support the needs of veterans through the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the performance of High Life Highland (HLH) during the operating period to 31 March 2024, including HLH's contributions to the implementation of the Highland Council Corporate Plan in Appendix A;
- ii. general updates provided in section 2 of the report;
- iii. that HLH continued to deliver Public Service Obligations on behalf of the Highland Council as set out in the Service Delivery Contract;
- iv. progress on the Service Delivery Contract Review; and
- v. information in section ten, income growth and development in partnership with the Highland Council.

10. Eden Court Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Chùirt an Easbaig

Transparency Statement: Ms S Atkin declared a connection to this item as a Member of Eden Court Board but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

The Chair welcomed Rebecca Holt, Chief Executive, Eden Court, who gave a presentation on the work of Eden Court, including the work being done with schools, young people and the wider community.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the work being done by Eden Court to support local cinemas, particularly in the Seaboard villages; deliver programmes; secure funding; and promote intergenerational activities was commended;
- it was queried whether experienced music teachers from areas such as Lochaber were involved in creative programmes;
- it was great to see young people involved in Inverness Musical Theatre;
- in response to a question, it was explained that while Eden Court Under Canvas would not be touring the Highlands in 2024 there were plans to take the work of Eden Court to other parts of the Highlands through projects such as In on the Act;
- the importance of encouraging children to become involved in creative industries was emphasised; and
- the Chair proposed that further updates on the work of Eden Court be provided on an annual basis.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the presentation; and
- ii. **AGREED** that further updates on the work of Eden Court would be presented to the Committee on an annual basis.

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

There had been circulated Report No EDU/12/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

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

12. Parental Engagement Strategy **Ro-innleachd Com-pàirteachadh Phàrantach**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/13/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the Parental Engagement Strategy and Improvement Plan were based on engagement that had taken place with parents and carers across the authority as well as representatives from Parent Councils and the third sector.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- there was a tension between parents wanting involvement in their own child's education and the wider role of the Parent Council;
- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that Parent Councils and Parent Forums could, and did, communicate directly rather than via their school;
- it was hoped that the Strategy would make the boundaries to parental involvement clear as it could be difficult for parents to understand how far their rights in decision-making extended;
- the multi-agency relationships associated with this area of work were highlighted;
- parents had a deeper understanding of their children than schools did, and it was important to be aware that, in the case of children with ASN, their behaviour could vary greatly between school and home and schools;
- children who were neuro-diverse often had parents who shared their condition, and it might be more difficult for these parents to engage with schools;
- information was sought, and provided, on the number of parents who had said they would like more information about careers and post-school pathways and opportunities, and what could be done to improve this;
- the Chief Executive, Care and Learning Alliance, thanked officers for their collegiate approach and involving the third sector in the development of the Strategy;
- the Highland Parent Council Partnership (HPCP) provided an opportunity for Parent Councils from across Highland to share information and it was queried whether further HPCP conferences could be held as these had previously proved very helpful; and
- one issue in terms of parental involvement was that secondary school pupils often found it embarrassing for their parents to be involved with the school.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report;
- ii. **APPROVED** the Parental Engagement Strategy – Appendix 1 of the report; and
- iii. **APPROVED** the Highland Council Parental Engagement Strategy Improvement Plan – Appendix 2 of the report.

13. Community Learning and Development Year 2 Report – October 2022 to September 2023

Aithisg Bliadhna 2 Ionnsachadh agus Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd – Dàmhair 2022 gu Sultain 2023

There had been circulated Report No EDU/14/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- on the point being raised, it was confirmed that work was being done to improve impact assessments for committee reports, and a report on the Integrated Impact Assessment tool that was being developed would be presented to the Council in June;
- it was hoped that Community Learning and Development (CLD) would include education on climate change as this was an important subject that had a big impact on people's lives; and
- the importance of third sector groups in the wellbeing of communities was emphasised, and it was queried if there could be greater involvement of third sector groups in CLD.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the progress, including key achievements, made in year two of the Highland Community Learning and Development Plan;
- ii. the priorities and focus for year three of the Highland Community Learning and Development Plan, and;
- iii. that the annual inspection visit from His Majesty Inspectors of Education for Community Learning and Development had been advised to The Highland Council for Monday 3rd to Wednesday 5th June.

14. Statutory Consultation Exercise – Badcaul Primary School: Request to Proceed to Consultation on Permanent Closure

Eacarsaich Co-chomhairleachaidh Reachdail – Bun-Sgoil a' Bhad Chall: Iarrtas a Dhol air Adhart gu Co-chomhairleachadh mu Dhùnadh Maireannach

There had been circulated Report No EDU/15/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were extended to Council officers and the Scottish Government, particularly the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, for answering questions and providing information around the closure of rural schools;

- in most previous cases of school closures, the closure had been a practical choice based on the proximity of an alternative school which pupils could attend, whereas in this case the nearest alternative schools were 31 miles and 13 miles away;
- there was a presumption in Scotland against the closure of rural schools, and if an application for closure was rejected it could not be re-submitted for five years thus providing some stability for the community;
- a full consultation to look at all the issues, particularly those concerning depopulation, would be the best way forward in this case, and it would be important for all members of the community to engage with the consultation process to achieve a positive outcome;
- the consultation would not necessarily lead to closure of the school but was an opportunity to look at possible developments within the community to keep the school open and the community thriving;
- with reference to the earlier item on school rolls, it was encouraging that schools and school rolls would not be looked at in isolation;
- rural depopulation was a core element of Council forward-planning and should be reflected in consultations around the future of schools;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that Scoraig Primary School and community could be included in the list of consultees;
- a consultation on school closure was preferred to continued mothballing;
- it was encouraging that the Education Service was looking at different options rather than focusing solely on school closure; and
- school closures had become too common in recent years and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that a list of school closures in Highland in last 10 years could be provided.

The Committee **AGREED**:-

- i. to proceed to statutory consultation on the basis of the Proposal Paper attached to the report;
- ii. that Scoraig Primary School be added to the list of consultees in the report; and
- iii. that a list of schools in Highland that had closed in the last 10 years be circulated to Members of the Committee.

The meeting concluded at 2.30 pm.