

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	10.
Report No	EDU/21/24

Committee: Education

Date: 12 September 2024

Report Title: GIRFEC Update

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) is the Scottish Government's commitment to provide all children, young people, and families with the right support at the right time, so that every child and young person can reach their full potential. It is a strengths-based approach, seeking to realise children's rights, promote equality and value diversity. It is underpinned by key values and principles that place the child or young person and their family at the centre of service provision, with full participation in decisions that affect them.

Wellbeing is considered as being about all areas of life including family, community, and society, with this clearly articulated through the wellbeing indicators (Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, and Included). Support is provided for children, young people, and families when they need it, until things get better, to help them to reach their full potential, with support provided on the basis of assessment and intervention recorded on a single plan.

1.2 The Scottish Government has consistently committed to embedding GIRFEC at the heart of all policies and services, building on the achievements and good practice established since 2006, with a significant contribution from Children's Services in Highland. Recent updates to national guidance have incorporated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), The Promise and a continued commitment to eradicate child poverty.

1.3 GIRFEC is an evidence-based, internationally recognised and child-rights-based approach. It is locally embedded and positively embraced by organisations, services, and practitioners across Children's Services Planning Partnerships, with a focus on changing culture, systems, and practice for the benefit of babies, infants, children, young people, and their families.

1.4 This report outlines the current work being undertaken in Highland to review and refresh our own practice in line with the national guidance, to ensure our practice is aligned with national recommendations and expectations.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. **Note** the refreshed [national GIRFEC guidance](#)
- ii. **Note** that [revised guidance](#) will be published for Highland in the coming weeks.
- iii. **Note** that training on expected practice in assessing, planning for, and supporting children and young people will be arranged locally.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

There are no additional financial costs in relation to supporting the rollout of the refreshed guidance.

3.2 Legal

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.

3.3 Risk

Following the GIRFEC processes will mitigate risks to children, young people and families and will lead to more effective service outcomes.

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

There are no specific health and safety risks relating to the implementation of the refreshed GIRFEC approach.

3.5 Gaelic

There are no specific implications for Gaelic learners. The approach is used with all children and young people in Highland.

4. Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies, or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required. However, a screening has been undertaken and this indicates the positive benefits to children and young people where the guidance is implemented well.

5. Background

5.1 In 2001 The Scottish Government published *For Scotland's Children* which outlined the system improvements required in information sharing, assessment, resource allocation and review processes across Scotland. In Highland, we responded with the

creation of a Joint Children's Service and the publication of our first integrated children's plan *For Highland's Children (1)*.

5.2 After a public consultation on the reform of children's services, the national GIRFEC Implementation Plan was published in 2006. This approach was used and tested by pathfinders across Scotland, one of which was Highland. The evaluation of the Highland Pathfinder was published in 2009, providing positive examples of the benefits from using The Practice Model in relation to assessment, support and intervention for children and young people at all ages and levels of need. These benefits included:

- greater clarity about who families could go to when they needed help;
- reduced time in meetings for professionals and parents, children, and young people;
- agencies and third sector partners were able to focus resources on those children who needed most support;
- support was provided earlier;
- fewer children required compulsory state intervention.

5.3 In 2012 an updated guide to GIRFEC was published nationally and was enacted in Highland, alongside the Lead Agency Model that further streamlined the management structures for services being provided for children and young people, in line with the recommendations of the GIRFEC Practice Model.

5.4 In 2022 the [inspection report](#) from the Highland Children's Service's Inspection was published. Inspectors found that as time had gone on, practice in Highland had become less consistent and, with changes in staff over time, the Practice Model was not as well understood and was therefore less effective as the basis for supporting children. They commented that "The language, framework and principles of Getting it right for every child were not universally shared or used across all staff groups." As a result, a refresh of the GIRFEC principles and practice model was agreed to be undertaken across all services working with children and young people.

5.5 In 2022/23 [updated guidance](#) was published by The Scottish Government, further strengthening a rights-based approach in line with the UNCRC (Scotland) (Incorporation) Act (2024). Funding was also provided to all local authorities to support Whole Family Wellbeing and early intervention in line with the GIRFEC principles. This national guidance was able to be used to refresh our own guidance in Highland and a team was established within Health and Social Care to support [Whole Family Wellbeing](#).

6. Guidance and Governance

6.1 The Highland Integrated Children's Services Board has oversight of the implementation of the National (GIRFEC) Practice Model and several aspects of the action plan created following the Children's Services Inspection. The Child Protection Committee reports to the Integrated Children's Services Board along with The Promise Board and other improvement groups that gather data that reflect the effectiveness of the use of the Practice Model in Highland.

6.2 The integration of child protection within the Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) continuum and framing responses to child protection concerns within the national practice model is a critical feature of the Highland revised guidance and procedures.

There is a clear articulation of the importance of GIRFEC to protecting children, particularly in recognising that all children must receive the right help at the right time.

7. Changes to the National Practice Model

- 7.1 The refreshed National Practice Model contains a number of key changes which are reflected in the Highland revised guidance and procedures:
- Greater emphasis on child-centred, rights-respecting, strengths-based practice and the inclusion of children, young people and their families at every stage of the process;
 - Simpler language identified which can be used when working together with children, young people and families;
 - A deeper understanding of the impact of trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in considering the My World Triangle; and
 - Further detail provided on the Resilience Matrix.
- 7.2 Guidance, procedures and assessment frameworks may promote broad consistency. However, effective communication and partnership is a matter of relationship. This begins with listening and seeking shared understanding. Intuition, analysis, consultation and professional judgement all play a part in deciding when and how to intervene in each situation. Inter-agency training and predictable supervision are key to safe, principled and competent practice and all are recommended within our Highland practice.

8. Training

- 8.1 A series of nine, 3 hour in-person workshops were provided to all interested staff in May and June 2024, to enable practitioners to engage with other colleagues in discussion, to become more familiar with the GIRFEC principles and to refresh their understanding of these. 284 practitioners from a range of services attended these workshops and provided feedback on them, to enable changes to be made for a second series of sessions planned for 2024-25.

Overall, these workshops were rated 4 out of 5 for relevance, use of time and interest in the subject matter. Attendees valued the multi-agency discussion and requested further training be provided on chronologies and the child's plan.

The full feedback from these pilot workshops have been discussed at the Integrated Children's Services Board in August, with further decisions regarding ongoing training for practitioners made within that forum.

- 8.2 In addition to the workshops, an e-learning module was created for practitioners to complete prior to attendance. 285 practitioners have thus far completed this module. Feedback has been taken from those who have completed the module, and it is being updated in light of this. It is intended that this e-module will be able to be used as part of the induction training for all staff new in post, who will be working with children and young people, as well as continuing to be a pre-requisite for more experienced staff who sign up for the in-person multi-agency sessions.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

- 9.1 The GIRFEC Practice Model approach underpins both preventative and child protection processes. This includes an identified point of contact to provide early support, advice and access to services, a shared approach to assessment and consideration of wellbeing, and a shared response to identified needs, including planning for children across services where needed.

Parents need to know who they can contact when they need access to relevant support for their child's wellbeing. Within this approach, these foundations are carried out through the role of a **named person** who is able to provide a clear point of contact within universal services. This is usually a health professional (midwife/health visitor) from birth to school age; a head teacher or depute during primary school years; and a head teacher, depute or pastoral care teacher during secondary school years. The family may be offered direct support from their named person, or access to relevant services offered by the NHS, Highland Council and third sector or community groups.

At times during childhood and adolescence, some children and young people will need some extra help. A named person can provide or access information, advice and support to children and young people from within their own service, and when necessary, request support from other services or agencies.

- 9.2 When support is required from a number of different agencies a **lead professional** will be needed. The lead professional is an agreed, identified person within the network of practitioners who are working alongside the child or young person and their family. In most cases, the professional who has the greatest responsibility in coordinating and reviewing the child's plan will undertake this role.

Throughout a child or young person's journey, this person may change depending on the child or young person's needs, but there should always be a lead professional identified when there is a multi-agency child's plan. In child protection cases, the role of a lead professional will be taken by the local authority Social Work Services.

10. The Practice Model Tools

- 10.1 The Practice Model has four steps outlined below. The voice of the child or young person should be evident at all stages; their opinions and perspectives need to be taken into account in accordance with age and maturity of the child (UNCRC, Article 12) in a developmentally appropriate way:
1. The **Wellbeing Indicators**: Using the wellbeing indicators in the 'Wellbeing Wheel' to observe, discuss and record information which may indicate the scaffolding of support needed for a child or young person.
 2. The **'My World' Triangle**: Helps to understand a child or young person's whole world. It can be used to explore their experience at every stage, recognising there are connections between the different parts of their world. In the assessment process, it can be used to explore strengths, needs and risks.
 3. The **Resilience Matrix**: Used in more complex situations, the Resilience Matrix helps organise and analyse information when there is a perceived risk to a child or young person.

4. **Planning, action, and review** using the 'Wellbeing Wheel': When the child or young person's needs are clear, they can be summarised using the Wellbeing Wheel to develop an individual plan to provide support.

- 10.2 When a child's needs cannot be met within a standard or core provision in education or health services, the assessment and all of the actions to meet additional needs will be recorded in one integrated Child's Plan. The content of the written Child's Plan should be proportionate to the child's circumstances but follows a standard structure.
- When the Child's Plan can be fulfilled by some additional resources within a universal service, this is a single service Child's Plan.
 - When the Child's Plan requires the input of more than one service, this is a multi-agency Child's Plan.
 - When interventions are required to protect a child from significant harm, this is a Child's Protection Plan.

Prior to adopting GIRFEC, many professional services and teams had their own referral forms. Reports were required in different formats when accessing specialist services and processes and families were constantly being asked to attend a range of meetings, which often involved the same practitioners and discussed similar issues. In Highland, we worked to create a single planning document and evidence to request input from other services.

Since the last planning format was agreed in 2018, there has been some frustration from families and services, that additional forms are starting to be used by a range of services again. In an attempt to understand this better and to return to an agreed single planning format, a review of the use and format of the Child's Plan has been established. This will be undertaken under the governance of the Integrated Children's Services Planning Board, with findings from this shared in early 2025.

- 10.3 **Solution Focused Approaches (SFA)** can be very effective in bringing about change in complex situations. Even a short conversation can have solution focused elements to build collaboration and break the cycle that maintains problems. Practitioners in Highland have used this way of working to engage effectively with other professionals, families and with children and young people within the Practice Model. This approach can be helpful in preventive work, at the systemic level and in helping staff groups and teams find effective ways of working or resolving barriers.

Training and facilitation in these approaches can be accessed from the Highland Council Psychological Service, who provide regular sessions on SFAs and running SF Meetings for any interested staff working with children and young people.

This approach follows a carefully designed solution-focused process and involves children, young people, and families to bring about change in complex situations. Within the Practice model, Solution Focused Meetings are used as efficient ways to review and deepen Child Plans. It is good practice for ASGs to have regular timetabled Solution Focused Meetings, involving a regular group of professionals so that a positive cycle of assessment, intervention and review can be embedded. However, over time practice in SF meetings has also achieved less fidelity to the recommended process and so the GIRFEC refresh is recommending practitioners update their SF training and enhance their understanding of decision making, meeting facilitation and how to best prepare children, young people and families for these meetings to ensure they are in-line with the GIRFEC principles.

11. Summary

- 11.1 The National Practice Model and the GIRFEC principles are not new to us in Highland. There have been changes and updates over time, but the general principles and values have remained consistent. In recent years practice in Highland has become less consistent, with less fidelity to the Practice Model. To help refresh and reset practice, updated GIRFEC and Child Protection guidance and procedures have been written to support practitioners in Highland. The impact assessment screening for the guidance indicates the positive benefits to children and young people where this is implemented well. It will be launched in late summer 2024 and supported by a new e-module and in-person workshops. Guidance on the UNCRC is also available on the [Children's Rights and Participation website](#). The Highland Integrated Children's Services Board will monitor the access to training delivery and the outcomes for children and young people over time.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – People

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Background Papers: Links to relevant papers are provided throughout this report.

Appendices: n/a