

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 12 September 2024 at 10.35 am.

### **Present:**

|                          |                            |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Ms S Atkin               | Ms L Kraft                 |
| Mrs M Cockburn           | Ms M MacCallum (remote)    |
| Ms L Dundas (substitute) | Mr D Macpherson            |
| Ms S Fanet               | Mr J McGillivray (remote)  |
| Mr J Finlayson (Chair)   | Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)   |
| Mr R Gale                | Mrs M Reid (substitute)    |
| Mr J Grafton             | Ms M Ross                  |
| Mr D Gregg               | Mrs L Saggars (substitute) |
| Ms M Hutchison (remote)  | Mr R Stewart (substitute)  |

### **Religious Representatives (non-voting):**

Rev C Caley  
Ms S Lamont

### **Youth Convener (non-voting):**

Ms L McKittrick

### **Non-Members also present:**

|                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Mr D Fraser (remote)    | Mr D McDonald (remote)   |
| Mr K Gowans (remote)    | Mr P Oldham (remote)     |
| Mr P Logue              | Mrs M Paterson (remote)  |
| Mr T MacLennan (remote) | Mrs T Robertson (remote) |

### **In attendance:**

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People  
Ms F Grant, Chief Officer – Secondary Education  
Ms C Macklin, Head of Education, Lifelong Learning and Gaelic Services  
Ms A MacPherson, Head of Resources  
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  
Ms L Walker, Education Support Officer  
Mr M Jones, Collaborative Lead Officer  
Ms K Clark, Collaborative Lead Officer  
Mr I Jackson, Education Officer  
Mr S Callander, Head Teacher, Drakies Primary School  
Mr D Mackenzie, Depute Head Teacher, Drakies Primary School  
Ms M Neil, Depute Head Teacher, Inverness Royal Academy  
Ms J Douglas, Care and Learning Alliance (Third Sector)  
Ms M Chemonges, Highland Parent Council Partnership (remote)  
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer  
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

**Also in attendance:**

Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland

Pupils from Drakies Primary School and Inverness Royal Academy

**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**

The Chair welcomed the new Youth Convener, Lauren McKittrick, and Rev Clare Caley, religious representative, to their first meeting of the Education Committee, explaining that Ms McKittrick would be observing today but would have the opportunity to outline her priorities at the November meeting of the Committee.

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

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs I Campbell, Ms H Crawford, Mrs I MacKenzie and Mr W Skene.

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

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

Item 8: Mr R Stewart

Mr J Grafton made a general Transparency Statement on the basis that his partner was a teacher in Highland but, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

**3. Recess Powers  
Cumhachdan Fosaidh**

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 27 June 2024 had not been exercised in relation to the business of the Education Committee.

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

A presentation on outstanding achievements by pupils and schools was shown, followed by a video on Rights Respecting Schools.

Thereafter, the Chair welcomed staff and pupils from Drakies Primary School and Inverness Royal Academy who gave presentations on their journeys to achieving Gold Accreditation as Rights Respecting Schools.

The Chair drew attention to another achievement in that this week marked the 40th anniversary of Sutherland Schools Pipe Band. There would be a mass band parade and an evening with the Rogart Ceilidh Band on Saturday 21 September to celebrate this landmark.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- thanks were expressed to staff and pupils for the presentations, which showed the quality of education, and the confidence of young people, in Highland schools;
- respecting the rights of children, inclusivity, and providing a safe environment that was conducive to learning were of utmost importance;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that Rights Respecting Schools was rolled out across Highland. As of June 2024, there were 174 schools engaged in the programme at various stages, details of which were provided;
- Drakies Primary School and Inverness Royal Academy consistently received praise from parents, and Members expressed pride to be representing schools doing such good work; and
- the amount of work and determination involved in the journey to achieving Gold accreditation were recognised, and congratulations were extended to both schools.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentations.

#### **5. High Life Highland Service Delivery Contract Review Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Ath-sgrùdadh Cùmhnant Libhrigidh High Life na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/16/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that it was anticipated that the full Service Delivery Contract Review would be concluded in time for reporting to the November meeting of the Education Committee.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the proposal was to transfer Adult Learning and Youth Work back to the Council and it was hoped that, in time, Youth Work would align with the school curriculum. Furthermore, it was questioned if the associated budgets would be allocated to schools. In response, it was hoped this alignment would eventually take place but at present it was a matter of consolidating the service. Consequently, meantime, there would be no radical changes proposed. It also had to be borne in mind that Youth Work engaged with young people outwith the formal educational setting;
- it was questioned why the Integrated Impact Assessment had concluded that there was no impact on children and young people when the entire service was being transferred. In response, it was confirmed that the screening that had been carried out could be shared with Members, and explained that, at present, the status quo was to be maintained but that eventually the transfer would have a positive impact;
- reference was made to the valuable and innovative work undertaken in remote and rural areas by Youth Work staff, and it was hoped this would not be lost; and
- further information was sought, and provided, on the short-term resource implications referred to in section 3.1 of the report.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. progress made on the contract review and that there would be a final report for Member consideration at the 21 November 2024 meeting of the Education Committee;
- ii. the need to adjust the Service Delivery Contract scope following the Council's introduction of the operational Delivery Plan and Highland Investment Plan;
- iii. following the review of Public Service Obligations it was proposed that High Life Highland should continue to deliver all but two of the services currently delivered on behalf of the Council;
- iv. it was considered that the transfer of adult learning and youth work services to the Council would support the Council's plans for education, employability, poverty reduction and community planning;
- v. no additional Council services had been identified as suitable for transfer to High Life Highland during the contract review;
- vi. the report to the Education Committee on 21 November 2024 would focus on the actions listed in section 7 of the report; and
- vii. the High Life Highland Board was consulted on this report, in draft, at its meeting held on 28 August 2024 and feedback from the Board was reflected in the report;

and **AGREED**:-

- i. the revised scope at section 8 of the report;
- ii. that matters relating to services delivered from assets owned by the Council and operated by High Life Highland be considered as part of the Reconfiguration of Council Assets Portfolio in the Operational Delivery Plan and also the Highland Investment Plan;
- iii. the commencement of the transfer process of adult learning and youth work from High Life Highland to the Council; and
- iv. that High Life Highland should continue to deliver the remaining Public Services Obligations that it operates on behalf of the Council.

## **6. Gaelic Education Foghlam Gàidhlig**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/17/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair commented that, whilst much of what happened in Gaelic education had, of late, been reported to the Gaelic Committee, it was still hugely important that the strategic Education Committee was the main forum for discussing and reporting on Gaelic education from 3-18.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- several Members having emphasised the importance of Gaelic education updates being reported to the Education Committee, it was proposed that a report on Gaelic education be brought to the Committee on at least an annual basis, if not more regularly, and this was agreed;

- it was important to understand that Gaelic education and English education were not separate services;
- the advantages of bilingual education were emphasised;
- the growth of Gaelic education was welcomed, and it was highlighted that, in the previous year, more children in Skye had been being taught through the medium of Gaelic than the medium of English;
- it was important for people to have an opportunity to use Gaelic outside of school as it was not just an academic subject but part of people's lives and culture;
- in response to a query, it was confirmed that the Gaelic team could find ways of celebrating Gaelic as part of European Language Day on 26 September and International Mother Language Day on 21 February;
- it was important to understand why so few pupils were continuing their Gaelic education to Higher level;
- the importance of Gaelic being embedded across all services was emphasised;
- information was sought, and provided, in relation to the Gaelic Specific Grant from the Scottish Government;
- the provision of adult courses was welcomed although the difficulty in finding tutors to run these courses in Lochaber was highlighted; and
- further to comments on the importance of promoting the use of Gaelic in the wider community, the Chief Executive, Care and Learning Alliance, spoke to the parent and toddler groups where parents as well as children were involved in learning Gaelic.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the growth in Gaelic education pupil numbers across Highland;
- NOTED** the challenges that increased demand for Gaelic education had created in some areas for the lifespan of the fourth iteration of the Highland Council's Gaelic Language Plan;
- NOTED** the two strategic priorities agreed with Bòrd na Gàidhlig for Gaelic Education in the approved statutory Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan; and
- AGREED** that a report on Gaelic education be brought to the Committee on at least an annual basis, if not more regularly.

## **7. Revenue Budget Monitoring Final Outturn 2023/24 Fior Thoradh Deireannach Sgrùdadh Teachd-a-steach 2023/24**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/18/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- concern was expressed regarding the widening gap between the highest and lowest attaining 20% of schools leavers, which was not because the highest attaining had improved but because performance had decreased in both indicators. It was clear that the current system was failing both high achievers and those who needed the most support. In responding to the points raised, it was explained that closing the attainment gap was a challenge nationally. It was an area of focus and officers would be working with schools in the current session to identify what more could be done;

- in relation to literacy and numeracy in P1, P4 and P7, whilst progress had been made it was not enough, and it was necessary to do more to ensure children were getting the foundational skills they needed to succeed;
- budget savings had been achieved by staff cuts in areas such as Additional Support for Learning, which was crucial in terms of supporting pupils at the lower end of the attainment spectrum, and such cuts undermined any hope of closing the gap between the lowest and highest attaining pupils;
- information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including the increasing rates of staff absence amongst both teaching and non-teaching staff; the RAG ratings in respect of school attendance rates; the measures that had not been RAG rated; and why school attendance rates, the aforementioned reduction in Complementary Tariff Scores in respect of the highest and lowest attaining 20% of school leavers, the reduction in respect of SCQF Level 5 and Level 6 attainment by children from deprived backgrounds, and the reduction in the percentage of pupils leaving school with one Level 5 or Level 6 SQA qualification had not been highlighted as areas of slippage. In relation to attainment in particular, it was explained that it was intended to bring a full report to the November Committee, following publication of the national figures and Insight data, to provide a complete picture of how Highland was performing against both its family group and the national position, and what it was intended to do where improvement was needed;
- in relation to the percentage of the Highland population with a High Life Highland card, it was questioned why the RAG rating was now Green when the same percentage had previously been ragged as Red;
- whilst school was about more than attainment, qualifications were important for achievement later in life, and were looked for by colleges, universities and employers;
- it was important to remember that young people were at the centre of what the Council was trying to deliver, and it was necessary to be cautious about comparing results;
- there was significant variation in attainment rates across Scotland, and it was necessary to take a holistic approach encompassing employment and further education;
- it was important to focus on addressing the inequalities that existed in Highland as they contributed to the attainment challenges;
- putting young people forward for certain exams in certain groups meant that the results did not necessarily provide the whole picture;
- Highland was a large authority with unique challenges and, going forward, it was necessary to work together to support young people and educationalists; and
- on the point being raised, it was clarified that the performance information in section 9.1 of the report was for academic year 2022/23, not 2023/24 as stated.

Following summing up, Mr R Stewart, seconded by Mrs L Saggars, **MOVED**, as an addition to the recommendations in the report, that the Committee agree to bring forward an action plan aimed at addressing both the shortfall in primary literacy and numeracy at P1, P4, and P7 levels, as well as strategies to close the attainment gap. This plan should prioritise investment in staffing, particularly in areas supporting lower-attaining pupils.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Mr J Finlayson, seconded by Mr D Millar, moved that the action plan proposed by Mr R Stewart was not needed as the work was currently taking place.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 3 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 13 votes, with 1 abstention. The **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:

**For the Motion:**

Mr D Gregg, Mrs L Sagers, Mr R Stewart.

**For the Amendment:**

Ms S Atkin, Mrs M Cockburn, Ms L Dundas, Ms S Fanet, Mr J Finlayson, Mr R Gale, Ms M Hutchison, Ms L Kraft, Ms M MacCallum, Mr J McGillivray, Mr D Millar, Mrs M Reid, Ms M Ross.

**Abstentions:**

Mr J Grafton

**Decision**

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the Service's revenue monitoring position;
- ii. scrutinised and **NOTED** Service performance and risk information; and
- iii. **AGREED** that the action plan proposed by Mr R Stewart was not needed as the work was currently taking place.

**8. Community Learning and Development (CLD) Plan 2024-2027  
Cunntas air Plana Ionnsachadh is Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd 2024–2027**

**Transparency Statement: Mr R Stewart declared a connection to this item as a Board Member of Youth Highland but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/19/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- some of the statistics around suicide and low economic activity were alarming;
- it was encouraging to see a strategy that involved everyone working together;
- the number of young people progressing to further or higher education was low but was not necessarily a cause for concern as many young people were choosing to start working instead;
- information was sought, and provided, on the funding available for community and third sector organisations working in CLD;
- the prioritisation of wellbeing and training was welcomed;
- it was queried what could be done to help tackle the lack of gender and cultural diversity in some sectors as there were several industries in Highland that had a predominantly male workforce, and it was important for the wellbeing of young people to be in a working environment where diversity was visible and they didn't feel the need to fit into a dominating culture. Particular reference was made to the misogynistic views spread by influencers such as Andrew Tate and the harmful effects that these could have on young men;

- as digital inclusion was stated as a priority within the plan, it was queried what work was being done to identify and support people who had problems accessing the internet; and
- the CLD work done in the Seaboard Villages area was commended and the importance of funding such work in rural communities was emphasised.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the content of the report; and
- APPROVED** the Community Learning and Development Plan (Appendix 2 of the report).

## **9. Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework Frèam Ionnsachaidh, Teagaisg is Measaidh**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/20/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the report, in many ways, consolidated and moved forward many of the queries Members had raised at recent Education Committee meetings. It outlined the refreshed Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework for Highland which had been drawn up in consultation with key stakeholders and schools, and liaison with other authorities and Education Scotland, and which was supported by ongoing engagement with The Northern Alliance to develop a toolkit that would further support practitioners across all sectors.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the holistic framework, which fed into the following item on GIRFEC, was welcomed, and Members looked forward to it being implemented;
- the phrase “lower attainment” was subjective and indicated a hierarchical judgement of young people. However, other Members commented that benchmarking was fundamental to performance monitoring and seeking continuous improvement;
- in relation to Organiser 2, the reference to effective questioning was welcomed as this empowered children;
- in relation to the Integrated Impact Assessment, thanks were expressed regarding the positive impact on children and young people;
- information was sought, and provided, regarding the monitoring of children who were being educated at home;
- whilst there was little in the framework than anyone could disagree with, it was common sense to most qualified teachers and it was suggested that, rather than putting more policies in place, it was necessary to look at what practical action could be taken to overhaul education, support teaching staff and young learners, and improve attainment. It was further suggested that more manuals/technical handbooks were needed to facilitate teaching. In responding to the points raised, the Chair emphasised that the most important thing in terms of improving education was not textbooks but the quality of learning and teaching. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework was an important document that supported practitioners and schools and provided consistency across the board;
- it was emphasised that all education systems needed a framework;



- there might be challenges in terms of achieving a balance between teacher autonomy and consistent implementation of evidenced approaches, and that was a matter for the Collaborative Lead officers;
- all Members ultimately wanted the same thing which was to improve attainment in Highland;
- whilst much of what was in the framework was very basic, such as a plenaries at the end of lessons, most jobs were about doing the basics well consistently, and it was welcomed that the elements in the framework would be understandable to the public;
- there were already a number of policies and frameworks in place relating to education, and information was sought, and provided, on how the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework would be monitored going forward to ensure it was being implemented consistently and identify any schools where improvements were needed;
- the framework represented the practical action called for by some Members, and addressed the need for consistency in assessment;
- the key word was “framework”; it was not prescriptive; and
- the use of negative language was toxic and not conducive to good learning.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the expectations placed on all practitioners to ensure high quality learning, teaching and assessment;
- NOTED** that the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework would provide guidance and support for individual schools in developing learning, teaching and assessment approaches to best meet the needs of their school communities;
- APPROVED** the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework (Appendix 1 of the report); and
- NOTED** the ongoing partnership through the Northern Alliance to develop further resources for school practitioners in learning, teaching and assessment.

## 10. Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) Update Cunntas air Ga Fhaighinn Ceart airson Gach Leanabh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/21/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the report outlined the refreshed national GIRFEC guidance and how it would influence the Highland approach which was set out in section 2.1 of the report. He also welcomed the key changes to the national practice model outlined in section 7.1 of the report.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the introduction of GIRFEC had revolutionised the way schools worked with children;
- it was important to recognise that this was not an educational process but a holistic approach across different services;
- the Child’s Plan process had become a paperwork exercise that needed to be reviewed;
- the importance of continuing to have a named person as a single point of contact for families was emphasised;

- information was sought, and provided, on the GIRFEC and Child Protection training that was available to Members;
- the practice around GIRFEC had become inconsistent and it was important that it was updated;
- an update was requested on the Neuro Developmental Assessment Service (NDAS) as, although improvements were being made, waiting lists were still growing. In response, the Chair clarified that the NDAS service was delivered by NHS Highland and the best way to ensure the Committee was updated would have to be investigated;
- this was a subject that sat between the Education Committee and the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee which meant that it sometimes did not receive the scrutiny needed;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that there would be no additional costs associated with the updated GIRFEC training as this would form part of the regular training provided by the Educational Psychology Service;
- on the point being raised that a number of schools within Highland, including Dunvegan Primary School, had issues with mould, asbestos and rodents, which was affecting pupils learning experience, the Chair confirmed that a new Dunvegan Primary School was included in the Council's Capital Programme;
- it was queried whether the new Child's Plan would be designed in a digitally-friendly way to make it easier for staff to use and improve efficiency;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that there were not currently long waiting lists for pupils to be assessed by an Educational Psychologist;
- in response to a request for information about placing requests, it was explained that this could not be provided for data protection reasons; and
- information was sought, and provided, on how teachers were trained for leadership positions in 3-18 campuses.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the refreshed national GIRFEC guidance;
- ii. **NOTED** that revised guidance would be published for Highland in the coming weeks;
- iii. **NOTED** that training on expected practice in assessing, planning for and supporting children and young people would be arranged locally; and
- iv. **AGREED** that the best way to ensure the Committee was updated on NDAS be investigated.

**11. Statutory Consultation: Final Report into Gaelic Medium Catchment Consultation – Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis, Dingwall and Nairn  
Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Aithisg Dheireannach mu Cho-chomhairleachadh Sgìre-sgoile Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig – Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis, Inbhir Pheofharain agus Inbhir Narann**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/22/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In introducing the report, the Education Officer drew Members' attention to a late representation that referred to one property on the boundary of the catchment areas for Millbank Primary and Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis and advised that it would not be an issue to include this property within the catchment area of Millbank Primary.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was important to formalise catchment areas to provide clarity to schools and parents; and
- thanks were extended to Mr I Jackson, Education Officer for the work done to establish Gaelic catchment areas.

\* Having considered the proposal set out within the Consultation Report and associated appendices, the representations received and the report from Education Scotland, the Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the creation of Gaelic Medium catchment areas for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis, Dingwall Primary School, Millbank Primary School, Inverness Royal Academy, Dingwall Academy, and Nairn Academy, on the basis set out at paragraph 1.2 of the report.

**12. Statutory Consultation Exercise – Request to Proceed to Consultation on replacing the School Nurseries at Caol Primary and St. Columba’s Roman Catholic Primary with a new setting serving both schools**  
**Eacarsaich Co-chomhairleachaidh Reachdail – Iarrtas a Dhol air Adhart gu Co-chomhairleachadh gus na Sgoiltean-àraich aig Bun-Sgoil a’ Chaoil agus Bun-Sgoil Chaitligeach Cholm Chille a Dhùnadh agus Suidheachadh Ùr a Chur nan Àite a Bhios a’ Frithealadh an Dà Sgoil**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/23/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation on the basis of the Proposal Paper attached to the report (Appendix A).

**13. Statutory Consultation – Establishment of a New Primary School for the Tornagrain Area**  
**Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail – Stèidheachadh Bun-sgoil Ùir airson Sgìre Thòrr na Grèine**

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

During discussion, the decision to move forward with establishing a new school in Tornagrain while retaining the existing Croy Primary School was welcomed as this was what local people wanted.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation on the proposal set out at Appendix 2 of the report, to establish a new primary school to serve the Tornagrain housing development, with a consequential amendment to the catchment area of Croy Primary School.

**14. Minutes of Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers**  
**Geàrr-chunntas na Comataidh Barganachaidh Ionadail do Thidsearan**

There had been circulated, and were **NOTED**, draft Minutes of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers held on 5 June 2024.

The meeting concluded at 2.10 pm.