

## The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 21 November 2024 at 10.35 am.

### **Present:**

Ms S Atkin (remote)	Mr D Gregg
Mrs I Campbell (remote)	Ms M Hutchison (remote)
Mrs M Cockburn (remote)	Ms L Johnston (remote)
Ms H Crawford (remote)	Ms L Kraft
Ms L Dundas (remote)	Ms M MacCallum (remote)
Ms S Fanet	Mr D Macpherson (remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Mr R Gale	Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)
Mr J Grafton	Mr R Stewart (substitute)

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

Rev C Caley  
Ms S Lamont (remote)

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

Ms L McKittrick

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

Mr A Christie (remote)	Mr B Lobban (remote)
Mr S Coghill (remote)	Mr P Logue
Mr D Fraser (remote)	Mr G MacKenzie (remote)
Mr K Gowans	Mrs A MacLean (remote)
Dr M Gregson	Mr P Oldham (remote)
Mr R Jones (remote)	Mrs T Robertson (remote)
Mr S Kennedy (remote)	Ms M Ross (remote)
Mr E Knox (remote)	

### **In attendance:**

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People  
Ms F Grant, Chief Officer – Secondary Education  
Ms A Jansson, Interim Chief Officer – Early Years and Primary Education  
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer – Integrated People Services (remote)  
Ms A MacPherson, Head of Resources  
Mr I Kyle, Head of Integrated Children's Services  
Mr D Martin, Area Education and Learning Manager (Mid)  
Mrs F Shearer, Area Education and Learning Manager (South)  
Ms B Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist  
Ms M Garson, Senior Lead, Employability and Skills 3-18  
Mr I Jackson, Education Officer (remote)  
Ms F Dalgetty, Chief Executive, Fèis Rois (Third Sector)  
Ms G Rodger, Chief Officer, Inspiring Young Voices (Third Sector) (remote)  
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

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**

**Preliminaries**

Prior to the commencement of formal business, the Chair welcomed the new Third Sector representatives, Gaener Rodger, Inspiring Young Voices, and Fiona Dalgetty, Fèis Rois, to their first meeting of the Committee.

**Business**

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

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mrs I MacKenzie.

**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 6: Mr D Macpherson

Item 8: Mr D Gregg

Item 11: Mr D Gregg

Item 12: Mr D Gregg and Mr R Stewart

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

The Chair congratulated High Life Highland on its recent successes, highlighting that the Archive Service had been voted best archive record keeping service in the UK by the UK Archive and Records Association. High Life Highland had also won a prestigious Community Leisure UK award for sustainability, recognising the outstanding work done by Countryside Rangers, Libraries and the Botanic Gardens in protecting the environment.

A presentation on outstanding achievements by pupils and schools was then shown.

The Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

#### 4. Supporting the Education of Children from Armed Forces Families A' Toirt Taic do dh'Fhoghlam Chloinne bho Theaghlaichean nam Feachdan Armaichte

There had been circulated Report No EDU/25/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

Bernadette Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist, gave a presentation in amplification of the report.

During discussion, the following main points were made:-

- Members expressed thanks for the inspiring report, and commended those working to mitigate the disadvantages and barriers experienced by children from Armed Forces families;
- in response to questions, it was confirmed that the Military Liaison Group (MLG) worked with Armed Forces children up to the age of 18, and the Armed Forces Covenant included those in tertiary education, even after a marital separation;
- the inclusion of Reserve Armed Forces was welcomed;
- as set out in section 7.3 of the report, national studies showed educational disadvantage for children from Armed Forces families. However, in Highland there appeared to be no difference between children from Armed Forces families and the general school population in terms of Additional Support Needs (ASN) and social, emotional and behavioural needs, and information was sought, and provided, as to whether this was testament to the partnership work and “family first” approach in Highland;
- the report demonstrated that there were no quick fixes to challenges, and it was a matter of working together and having trust in the strategy, which was clearly paying off;
- with reference to the families’ patch in Wimberley Way, Inverness, Local Members expressed thanks to the Head Teachers and staff at Raigmore and Drakies Primary Schools and Millburn Academy for their excellent work in supporting children from Armed Forces families;
- reference having been made to the data on ASN, exclusion and attendance rates, it was queried whether it was also possible to track differences in attainment between children from Armed Forces families and the general school population. In response, it was confirmed that attainment data was being gathered and could be provided in future reports; and
- it was suggested that some of the learning from the MLG in terms of the organisation and sharing of information could be transferrable to other situations within the education system.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the information about the service that the Military Liaison Group (Education) provided;
- ii. **NOTED** the potential impact of challenges and barriers that might be faced by children and young people from Armed Forces families;
- iii. **NOTED** the support, resourcing and training that the Military Education Group (Education) provided which could be signposted to families, educators, and communities; and

iv. **AGREED** that attainment data be included in future reports on the education of children from Armed Forces families.

## 5. Highland Youth Convener Update Cunntas às Ùr mu Neach-gairm Òigridh na Gàidhealtachd

Lauren McKittrick, Highland Youth Convener, gave a presentation sharing her action plan for the year ahead and an update on the progress she had made since taking up the Youth Convener role in August.

During discussion, the following main points were made:-

- Members thanked the Youth Convener for the interesting and inspirational presentation, wished her every success in her endeavours over the coming year, and looked forward to future discussions with her;
- vaping was a concern to everyone involved in health services, and information was sought, and provided, on young people's concerns about vaping and what more could be done about it;
- transport was an issue for young people living in rural areas, and the Youth Convener's support in that regard would be welcomed; and
- it was queried how the Youth Convener was finding being able to communicate with and visit all areas of Highland to carry out her role.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

## 6. Senior Phase Attainment and Scrutiny (Session 2023-24) Buileachadh is Sgrùdadh na Gàidhealtachd (Seisean 2023-24) ann am Frèam Creideis & Theisteanasan na h-Alba

**Transparency Statement: Mr D Macpherson declared a connection to this item as a close family member was a teacher in Highland but, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/26/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were made:-

- this was the first set of examinations since the Covid pandemic where learners had been assessed on the full curriculum in each subject area;
- it was suggested that changes were needed to address the systemic issues in the Highland education system, and concern was expressed regarding the leadership and functionality of the Education Committee and that pupils, teachers and wider school communities were being failed;
- the latest attainment figures showed that Highland pupils in S4 to S6 were falling further behind. These figures represented young people's life chances, and young people in Highland were at a disadvantage when applying to colleges and universities where they had to compete with peers from other areas who were outperforming them;
- staff morale was plummeting, and statistics were cited from the Council's staff survey from 2022 which reflected a workforce that was overburdened, under-resourced and unsupported;

- hard-working teachers, support staff and pupils deserved nothing but praise for their incredible efforts in challenging circumstances;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the remit of the proposed Raising Attainment Board would include the identified need to focus on school attendance and the strategic plan in that regard;
- whilst there were some positive figures in the report, the majority of the content reflected many years of the Highland Education system failing to keep up, not only with the national average but with the virtual comparator;
- sympathy was expressed for the pupils who had not managed to attain their desired results;
- it was misleading to suggest that the Council was delivering the highest quality learning and teaching experiences for all young people;
- the report stated that the Raising Attainment Action Plan created in 2022 would be reviewed and refreshed to ensure everyone in the system was clear on their role in raising attainment and improving outcomes for young people, and it was questioned if everyone in the system had not previously known what their role was, and who had been managing that;
- it was necessary to look at what had gone before and what was having an impact on classroom performance, and the importance of listening to teaching staff and the youth voice was emphasised;
- it was suggested that the previous Chief Executive had set a goal to reduce the number of Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) in schools, yet the number of pupils requiring additional support was increasing. Feedback from teaching staff was that the additional burden placed on them due to the loss of PSAs impacted the whole class, and the current PSA allocation system used an algorithm that paid little attention to need. It was therefore proposed that the Committee agree to undertake a review of the PSA allocation process to ensure that the need of the individual was the overarching criteria for the allocation of PSAs in all schools. In that regard, it was confirmed that a review was built into the current allocation model and would take place following the allocation in May 2025;
- the current system was not working, and it was necessary to make changes at a strategic level, taking into consideration the opinions and ideas of frontline teaching staff. Section 7 of the report made some robust comments on the way forward but results were needed, and a request was made for an early report on progress;
- thanks were expressed to officers for the work that had gone into the report, for responding to Members' questions in advance of the Committee, and for their commentary, which placed the report in the context in which it should be viewed;
- disappointment was expressed that the press had taken elements of the report out of context and published headlines that were detrimental about education in Highland, causing anxiety to parents of pupils preparing to sit prelims;
- children were more than numbers on a spreadsheet, and it was necessary to look at the picture behind the figures;
- the revised Raising Attainment Action Plan and proposed Raising Attainment Board were welcomed, as were the improvements identified in the National Improvement Framework report at item 11 on the agenda;
- the 2024 exam diet had seen a return to the traditional model of assessment for the first time since 2019, and the dip in the senior attainment had been seen across Scotland. Highland had dipped in 11 out of 16 measures compared to the national trend of 14 out of 16. The cohorts sitting those exams had been the children who had been at the significant transition period during Covid and the associated lockdown, which evidenced that it had been the right decision to

prioritise support for children at crucial periods of transition, and to invest in the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people;

- it was important that the impression was not being given that Highland was the worst Education authority in Scotland. That was by no means the case. Nevertheless, the authority was ambitious to improve and do better;
- there were factors that were unique to Highland that impacted on attainment figures - for example, Highland's rurality did not allow for an accurate virtual comparator, and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) did not adequately reflect rural poverty. Another significant factor was that special schools were not included in the national data. There were three special schools in Highland, all in a central location which meant that the majority of children with significant additional needs attended their local mainstream school as a special school was too far away. These children might be included in the attainment statistics, thereby lowering them, which would not be the case if they attended a special school;
- the inclusive, multi-agency, child-centred approach in Highland was commendable, and reference was made to the recent presentation at Full Council by the Deaf Education team, which was an example of Highland supporting young children with significant communication difficulties to belong in their communities and access education. All deaf children struggled to access English language, which impacted not only on English as a subject but on Maths, and this would also impact on attainment statistics;
- Highland continued to lead nationally in the early years measurements for listening and talking, and in young people achieving positive destinations;
- whilst it was recognised there was work to be done, Members commended Highland pupils for their efforts and praised staff for trailblazing in many ways;
- to facilitate scrutiny of performance, it would be helpful for Members of the Committee to read the minutes of the Raising Attainment Board and to have the opportunity to speak to members of the Board, and a request was made that a report from the Board be presented to each future meeting of the Committee, together with the minutes, to be considered in private session given the subject matter might be quite detailed. In response, the Chair confirmed that consideration would be given to the most appropriate means of Member engagement with the Raising Attainment Board;
- it having been queried why there was no national or virtual comparator for attendance in the report, it was explained that national attendance data was included in the National Improvement Framework report at item 11 on the agenda;
- with reference to earlier comments regarding special schools, it was queried whether it was possible to provide data on the number of pupils in rural secondary schools who would be at special schools in other local authority areas. In that regard, it was confirmed that there were currently 188 learners in special schools in Highland, and 256 in enhanced provisions across Highland;
- whilst it was acknowledged that there were challenges in terms of rurality, these were not new so it could not be said they were the reason Highland was not performing well. Highland was always going to be rural, and it was necessary to accept that and implement specific measures to overcome the associated challenges;
- there were 22 measures in the report where Highland was lower than the national average, and it was necessary to address that;
- the negative language in some contributions was unnecessary, and a call was made for Members to work together on how to respond to the attainment challenges and ensure progress was made;

- it was disheartening for children if they were not hearing the right messages, and it was necessary to embrace the positives in the report;
- in relation to attendance, it was welcomed that the figures included online attendance, and it was queried whether there was any information as to why children were not attending school;
- it was welcomed that Area Committees would have the opportunity to scrutinise Associated School Group (ASG) performance data in the new year;
- information was sought, and provided, as to whether the fact that awards at higher levels attracted more tariff points was skewing the attainment figures, and whether a different comparator was needed due to the rurality of Highland;
- several Members spoke to the impact of Covid, commenting that the Council was a trauma-informed organisation, and there were children who were still living with the trauma of what they had been through during the pandemic. Some children had not wanted to go to school since, which was a worrying trend that was replicated throughout the country;
- it was highlighted that it was Carers Rights Day, and carers were mentioned some 30 times in the papers for today's meeting. Young carers had a huge role to play in their families and communities, and it was important to remember that their learning was impacted by looking after family members;
- concern was expressed regarding the recommendation that the Raising Attainment Action Plan be revised to ensure all secondary schools and partners were working collaboratively, as Members had assumed that formal collaboration had already been taking place;
- there was a lack of detail and precision regarding the proposed Raising Attainment Board. In response to a question, it was clarified that there would be a single Raising Attainment Board that would meet throughout the year. It was also queried whether the proposal was based on evidence of success in other better-performing Council areas and, if so, whether more information could be provided on their journeys;
- reference was made to a previous proposal that the Council be paired with a top-performing Scottish Council so lessons could be learned in terms of how to drive through reform, and it was requested that that proposal be revisited;
- reference was made to section 6.5 of the report, which indicated that the focussed attention on S6 attainment for Quintile 1 learners had paid off;
- to say that nothing had changed since 2022 was not correct, and reference was made to the new management structure and the way of collaborating with, supporting and challenging schools;
- the only comparison that should be made was with the 2019 figures;
- whilst PSAs had an important role, increasing the number of PSAs was not the answer to the attainment challenges;
- it was important to recognise that there had been an independent review of education in Scotland, and changes were coming;
- reference was made to achievements in Highland, not only in terms of academic excellence but sporting excellence and the arts as well as Duke of Edinburgh and Community Volunteer Awards;
- many countries did not use exams to measure attainment, and it was necessary to take a holistic view of children and young people and look at wellbeing and positive destinations;
- low attainment did not mean that pupils could not go on to achieve in life;

- not all young people wanted to go to university and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Scottish Certificate and Qualifications Framework data in the report included vocational skills;
- whilst it was recognised that there had been a dip in performance nationally, if Highland was trying to improve its position it was necessary to ensure it did not dip at all;
- given the comments regarding rurality being a factor, it was queried whether it was possible to produce a report comparing the Inverness schools alone with comparable urban schools in Scotland;
- with education, it took a long time for changes to come to fruition, and pace and urgency were key;
- children were at the centre of this, and it was necessary to strive for excellence for Highland's children;
- attainment was the most important thing on the Committee's agenda. The next report should set out what interventions were necessary to ensure that Highland made seismic leaps forward and, thereafter, it was necessary to track progress at each meeting;
- there were wider issues such as job security for teaching staff and a reduction in the amount of inter-school and inter-colleague collaboration;
- national initiatives such as the National Improvement Framework provided an interesting context but were limited in terms of helping staff on the ground;
- there were talented staff in schools and the Education Service, but there had been a clear reduction in the number of experienced staff in recent years, and recruitment and retention was an area of concern;
- mentoring for newly qualified teachers was something that had been a great strength, but it was not as available as it needed to be due to staffing pressures;
- the figures in the report were affected by areas such as presentation policy within a school or ASG;
- Getting It Right For Every Child might mean choices that did not impact positively on the league table;
- in response to calls for a wider review, it was confirmed that was taking place, and that support structures were being looked at across the Education Service to ensure they were appropriate. Details were also provided on the recent changes to the senior management structure. As assurance was provided that attainment was the top priority, and a further report would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee in February;
- reference was made to personal experience of teaching in classrooms with variable attendance, concentration, phone use, application to homework, and parental and school support;
- the attainment figures did not include things such as arts, humanities and meta-skills;
- SQA units were reviewed and changed, so it was not possible to make a like for like comparison of one year to another; and
- 40% of pupils in Scotland had Additional Support Needs, and it was necessary to apply more resources to teaching individual children.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** Highland's Senior Phase Attainment for session 2023/24;



- ii. **AGREED** that the Raising Attainment Action Plan would be revised to ensure all secondary schools and partners were working collaboratively to develop improvements and evidence progress and impact;
- iii. **NOTED** that the delivery and impact of the revised Raising Attainment Action Plan would be monitored by a Raising Attainment Board which would provide direction, guidance and governance for the work required; and
- iv. **AGREED** that consideration would be given to the most appropriate means of Member engagement with the Raising Attainment Board.

**7. Service Performance Reporting and Quarter 2 Monitoring – 1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024**  
**Toradh Deireannach Teachd-a-steach Ràith 1 & Ro-aithris Ràith 2**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/27/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were made:-

- information was sought, and provided, as to whether there was an explanation for the increase in staff absence rates, and whether data was available in terms of customer satisfaction with the outcome of complaints; and
- reference was made to the impact of the menopause on female staff, and the importance of supporting teaching staff, not only in terms of the curriculum and child development etc but with personal issues, was emphasised.

The Committee:-

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

**8. High Life Highland (HLH) Progress Report**  
**Aithisg Adhartais High Life na Gàidhealtachd**

**Transparency Statement: Mr D Gregg declared a connection to this item as an employee of NHS Highland and on the basis that a close family member was a civil servant who had previously worked in Levelling Up but, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/28/24 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland.

In addition to the report, a video was shown on the specialist exercise classes for people with Parkinson's Disease being delivered as part of HLH's Health and Wellbeing Programme.

The Chair highlighted that, given some amazing performances by Highland athletes at the Olympic and Paralympic Games and the recent announcement that the Commonwealth Games were coming to Glasgow in 2026, part three of the report focussed on HLH's contribution to sport and physical activity. In order to frame part three of the report, HLH had used The Scottish Government's recent "Sport and Physical Activity on Health Framework" as a guide, focussing on the framework's

Active Sport and Recreation outcome which HLH delivered on behalf of the Council, and it was good to see how much was being done in this area.

During discussion, the following main points were made:-

- thanks were expressed for the report, the inspiring video and the work of HLH, and the progress that had been made since the Covid pandemic was welcomed;
- the work taking place in respect of Parkinson's Disease and falls prevention was commended. In that regard, it was queried whether there were opportunities for joined up working with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) who were also working with vulnerable groups in relation to home fire safety visits. The Chief Executive, HLH, undertook to take the matter up with SFRS colleagues through the Community Planning Partnership;
- in relation to the new sports pitch at Culloden, it had been understood it was primarily going to be used by local groups. However, they had been struggling to get access due it being used by large football teams, and clarification was sought as to how local people could book the pitch and what availability there was. The Chief Executive, HLH, undertook to revert to Mr R
- the increase in the number of young women participating in Shinty was encouraging;
- Am Baile was a fantastic asset for the Council, High Life Highland and the Gaelic community, and the success in terms of increasing engagement was welcomed;
- the increase in the number of library users was remarkable, and the benefits to young people of co-locating libraries and schools were emphasised;
- thanks to High Life Highland, more people than ever were benefiting from music tuition throughout Highland;
- the fact that over 44,000 people in Highland, 19% of the population, had a *highlife* leisure card was commendable;
- Members praised the "School's Out" programme of activities and the work of the Archive team, particularly the "Learn with Lorna" series of short films;
- reference was made to the huge amount of swimming lessons that had been provided and the benefits of learning to swim, and it was queried whether there was any strategic engagement with schools and families as to who could and could not swim;
- Ross Cairns, Scottish Athletics' performance coach of the year, was commended for his work with Inverness Harriers;
- Assynt Leisure Centre, which was affiliated with HLH, was offering a fully equipped learning space for pupils who could not get to school because of the snow;
- the benefits of the Highland Youth Parliament in terms of building confidence and leadership skills in young people were emphasised; and
- it would be good to have falls prevention classes in the Seaboard Villages. In addition, it was queried why Alness swimming pool was not open to the public during the day, and whether there was scope to open it for certain periods. The Chief Executive, HLH, undertook to liaise with Ms M Ross on these points.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the performance of High Life Highland (HLH) during the operating period to 30 September 2024, including HLH's contributions to the implementation of the Highland Council Corporate Plan in Appendix A of the report;
- ii. the general updates provided in part 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; and
- iv. the information on HLH's contributions to the national "Physical activity for health: framework".

## **9. High Life Highland (HLH) Service Delivery Contract Review Ath-sgrùdadh Cùmhnant Lìbhrigeadh Seirbheis High Life na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/29/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair commented that, as Members were aware, the Council and HLH had been working on a revised Service Delivery Contract over recent months, and he thanked officers from both organisations for the collaborative work they had done to enable the Committee to consider the revised contract today, subject to legal checks.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- the acknowledgement in the contract that High Life Highland was expected to rebuild reserves was welcomed; and
- the Adult Learning and Youth Work teams were commended for their efforts, and it was hoped their success would continue following their return to the Council.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. that the HLH Board had been consulted on the report, in draft, at a special meeting held on 25 October 2024 and feedback from the Board had been reflected in the report;
- ii. the arrangements for properties and vehicles associated with the adult learning and youth work services in Appendix 1 of the report;
- iii. that the performance reporting required of HLH by the Council had been updated as a result of the Service Delivery Contract review and had been included in the revised contract in Appendix 2 of the report;
- iv. that the service level agreements which specified the services the Council provided to HLH to allow it to operate would be reviewed by Council and HLH officers over the course of the coming year; and
- v. that specialist legal advice on the overall arrangement/legal framework had been sought by both organisations and the arrangement continued to meet all legal requirements;

and **AGREED** the revised Service Delivery Contract in Appendix 2 of the report subject to final legal checks following comment by both the HLH Board and the Education Committee at this meeting.

## **10. Briefing Paper - Education (Scotland) Bill Pàipear Brath-ullachaidh – Bile Foghlaim (Alba)**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/30/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- it would be interesting to see how the new qualifications body developed in the future as there were some concerns that this could be seen as a rebranding exercise;
- stakeholder involvement should include universities, colleges and employers;
- the proposed new Chief Inspector role was welcomed; and
- information was sought, and provided, on how the transition to the new inspection body would be handled in respect of schools that were currently going through an inspection process with Education Scotland.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report, which provided an overview of the key proposals in the Education (Scotland) Bill and outlined potential impacts on governance, qualifications, and education inspection.

## **11. National Improvement Framework (NIF) Annual Report Aithisg Bhliadhnaidh an Fhrèam-obrach Leasachaidh Nàiseanta**

**Transparency Statement: Mr D Gregg declared a connection to this item as an employee of NHS Highland but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that he had an interest to declare.**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/31/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair commented that the report articulated the contents of the current NIF plan whilst also outlining the progress and successes that had been achieved in terms of the previous plan. He drew attention to the continuing positive trend in terms of ACEL data results, which had been a focus for discussion at previous Education Committees.

During discussion, the following main points were made:-

- the hard work and dedication of teachers and school staff was applauded;
- the need to pursue both equity and excellence was emphasised as many of the most disadvantaged pupils were falling further behind while those with fewer barriers to success were not being supported to reach their full potential;
- concern was expressed regarding the drop in attendance levels at secondary schools, the effectiveness of the stretch aims and the increase in the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged students across several areas;
- the focussed plan to address the problem of pupil absences was welcomed;
- information was sought, and provided, on upskilling and further education opportunities for young people who went directly into employment after leaving school, and the rollout of trauma informed training for all school staff;
- there had been significant improvement in literacy and numeracy in Primary 1, 4 and 7;
- Highland was leading in listening and talking scores for early years due to collaborative working within the Northern Alliance. The positive effects of this were now being seen in results throughout primary schools and would hopefully continue into secondary levels;
- the sustained level of positive school leaver destinations was welcomed;
- in response to a request for more specific and measurable targets, the Chair confirmed that these would be included in future reports;

- children's behaviour had become more challenging, and while it was important for children to understand their rights it was also important for them to understand that these came with responsibilities such as good behaviour and respect for teachers;
- it was highlighted that the number of care experienced young people specified in the report might not be accurate due to not including some kinship arrangements, or previously care experienced young people who had moved into the area;
- although a reduction in Neuro Developmental Assessment Service waiting times would be welcomed, it was emphasised that what was most important was ensuring that the correct support was put in place for pupils, and that a diagnosis was not required for this;
- more outcome data from the collaborative work with Health and Wellbeing teams was requested; and
- the recognition of the SHANARRI indicators of wellbeing and the reference to professional leadership were welcomed.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the Education and Learning Annual Report 2023-2024 (Appendix 1 of the report);
- NOTED** the steps being taken to secure continuous improvement in session 2024/25 (Appendix 1 of the report);
- NOTED** that the progress report and Improvement Plan had been submitted to the Scottish Government, in line with the Local Authority's statutory requirements; and
- AGREED** that specific and measurable aims be included in future reports.

## 12. Community Learning and Development Annual Report – October 2023 to September 2024

**Aithisg Bhliadhnail Ionnsachadh agus Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd – Dàmhair 2023 gu Sultain 2024**

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

**Mr D Gregg, as an employee of NHS Highland**  
**Mr R Stewart, as a Board Member of Youth Highland**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/32/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were made:-

- the transformational impact of the initiatives supported by the Highland Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund was highlighted, and the use of the Fund to support projects across Highland was welcomed with particular attention being drawn to those in Skye and Lochalsh and the Thurso Young People's Project which was working to improve school attendance;
- attention was drawn to the fact that it was "I Will" Week, and the importance of youth activism and volunteering, including the Highland Youth Parliament, was emphasised;
- the important work done by the voluntary and charity sector across Highland was highlighted;

- attention was drawn to the success of the Vision 26 project, especially the involvement of so many young people;
- thanks were extended to local Youth Workers for their encouragement of young people in the Black Isle;
- the level of community engagement in the Black Isle Local Place Plan was commended; and
- it was hoped that Youth Work returning to schools would create more opportunities to work to improve school attendance;

The Committee **NOTED** the progress, including key delivery achievements, made in year three of the Highland Community Learning and Development Plan 2021-2024.

### **13. Educational Trusts Urrasan Foghlaim**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/33/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were made:-

- it was encouraging that there were funds available that could be used in a positive manner, and the report and recommendations were welcomed;
- information was requested, when it was available, on the eligibility criteria of the various Trusts so constituents could be signposted to them and encouraged to apply, and the Chair confirmed that could be arranged; and
- the Education and Learning Manager (Mid) was commended for the work done to update the various Trust Schemes and bringing the information to the Committee.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the work undertaken on behalf of Elected Members (the Trustees) to update the various trust schemes;
- APPROVED** the formation of the Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee, to meet twice a year to receive trust reports and make decisions on grants, bursaries, and scholarships;
- APPROVED** the proposed remit, as set out in section 8.4 of the report, and membership of the Sub-Committee; and
- AGREED** that information on the eligibility criteria in respect of the various Trusts be provided to Members when it was available.

### **14. Statutory Consultation: Request to proceed to statutory consultation on the proposed closure of Kinlochewe Primary School Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Iarrtas a dhol air adhart gu co-chomhairleachadh reachdail mu mholadh Bun-Sgoil Cheann Loch lù a dhùnadh**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/34/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were made:-

- the proposed closure was a sign of wider depopulation which was cause for concern;

- the closure of the school would leave a big gap in Wester Ross between Gairloch, Strath Garve and Sheildaig;
- the community was urged to engage with the consultation;
- it was emphasised that the Scottish Government's default position was to keep rural schools open;
- clarification was sought, and provided, on what the school transport arrangements would be if the recommendations were implemented; and
- the closure of the school could result in a lack of people wanting to move to the area.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation on the basis of the Proposal attached to the report.

**15. Statutory Consultation: Request to proceed to statutory consultation on the creation of a Gaelic Medium catchment area for the new Tain Primary School**  
**Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Iarrrtas a dhol air adhart gu co-chomhairleachadh reachdail airson sgìre-sgoile Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig a chruthachadh airson Bun-Sgoil ùr Bhaile Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/35/24 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation on the basis of the Proposal attached to the report.

**16. Membership of Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers**  
**Ballrachd Comataidh Barganachaidh Ionadail do Thidsearan**

The Committee **AGREED** the revised membership, in accordance with the political formula, which had been tabled at the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 2.35 pm.