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AIRPORT HOUSE

By Bill Alexander

Summary

This report provides an update on the operation of Airport House, the Intensive Support and Vocational Training Centre in Caithness. It makes proposals to confirm the post of Manager, which has been temporary since the commencement of the service, on a permanent basis.

1. Background

- 1.1 Airport House in Wick, was established in 2005 as an Intensive Support & Vocational Training Centre (ISVTC). It was a necessary development to complement the availability of Intensive Support and Monitoring Services in Caithness. It also sought to address increasing local experiences of high risk behaviour and educational disengagement, and to help reduce the number of young people being placed in residential schools outwith the authority.
- 1.2 The Joint Committee agreed a service specification for Airport House and the other ISVTCs at the Bridge (Inverness) and An Lar (Fort William) that described the purpose, ethos and operation of these centres.
- 1.3 HMle have had a keen interest in these developments, and it is likely that they will inspect one or both of An Lar and Airport House within the next 12-18 months, following their previous engagement with The Bridge and Black Isle Education Centre.

2. Service Specification

- 2.1 The service specification is based on a holistic and developmental view of the needs of troubled young people - on the understanding that each young person's needs are likely to be rooted in their life experiences and can only be accurately understood through a knowledge of those experiences.
- 2.2 A successful transition into adulthood is more likely for each young person if their social, emotional and educational needs are addressed through co-ordinated programmes which include elements that address each of their major needs. A major function of each Centre is therefore

to provide a base from which staff can engage with young people across all aspects of their lives, including in the evenings, at weekends and during school holidays, in order to address their needs.

- 2.3 It is expected that each ISVTC will have a vocational, developmental and problem solving ethos within which staff will work collaboratively with each young person to agree a set of desired aims/outcomes, and to achieve that young person's engagement in programmes, activities and processes to address these aims. There is a major emphasis on emotional literacy and restorative approaches, as part of the continuing Highland Council Restorative Interventions initiative.

3. Airport House Management

- 3.1 Like each of the ISVTCs, Airport House has been on a challenging developmental journey, with many successes but some difficulties.
- 3.2 It is managed jointly by the Area ECS Manager and the Area Children's Services Manager, with the latter taking the lead role. This is supported by Linda Thom, Coordinator for SEBD provision. There are collaborative links with the other ISVTCs and the Black Isle Education Centre.
- 3.3 The management of the Centre was initially established on a trial basis, as part of a shared role with the management of the Youth Action Team in Caithness and Sutherland.
- 3.4 It became clear that this was not viable or sustainable at an early stage in the operation of the Centre, and temporary arrangements were made through the secondment of an experienced manager from the Children's Centre in Wick.
- 3.5 This arrangement is overdue for review. It is clear that the provision is necessary, and is playing an increasingly integral role in local provision. Accordingly, it is proposed that the management of the centre is now established on a permanent basis.
- 3.6 The current secondment arrangement is funded from the dedicated budget for Airport House. This involves: £82,400 from GAE (formerly Changing Children's Services Fund), £10,000 from the earmarked Determined to Succeed funding stream, as well as teaching input from Wick High School, and support from the local Youth Action Service.
- 3.7 If a Manager was appointed on the grade of the equivalent service in Fort William, there would be no additional costs.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note this report and agree the proposal to establish a permanent Manager post at Airport House.

Bill Alexander

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