

**Highland Council: 27 June 2024: Questions****Public Questions****1. Mr D Garvie**

To the Leader

SSEN has submerged the Highland Council area in a multiplicity of different network enhancement proposals. Although all are inter-connected in some way or another, and although many will have a mutually cumulative combined effect, there has been no presentation from SSEN of the combined effect – over the whole area – of all its proposals.

SSEN is a large corporation with many paid employees and experts engaged full-time in preparing these proposals. Adversely affected communities have good reason to contest many of the claims made by SSEN in its presentation of its proposals. Communities only have unpaid volunteers, many giving up significant amounts of personal time, and without the benefit of the expert technical and legal input which SSEN has to hand. It seems therefore that the planning process is inherently flawed and biased, and will remain so unless the consultation process is changed to support local community groups to enable them to engage more effectively.

How does Highland Council intend to ensure that adequate focus and attention is given to the inputs from affected communities – which are the lifeblood of the Highland Council's area – in its objective assessment of whether planning permission should be granted for each of SSEN's many proposed developments?

The Council is consulted by the Scottish Government's Energy Consent Unit (ECU) on proposals for network upgrades and new lines that are submitted by SSEN to Scottish Ministers for approval under Section 37 of the Electricity Act.

The process is an inherently separate and distinct one from applications that are submitted under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Acts.

The Council has no direct influence over the extent of public consultation that would be undertaken in respect of applications for power lines under the Electricity Acts. Where proposals are submitted for sub-stations, these will be considered under the Planning Acts. Where the proposals are of a specific scale, considered to be of major and/or national significance, there is a requirement for SSEN to undertake statutory public consultation on the proposal prior to submission. However, the Council can only suggest what the form of that may take and who may be included; it is for the developer to undertake the consultation independently. It is for SSEN to determine how to undertake its consultation.

Where we are consulted on power lines, or substations in the case of planning applications, we require these to be referred to the relevant planning committee for consideration before providing a response to Ministers or making a decision.

Beyond any pre-application consultation, participation by affected communities in either process requires comments to be made to the determining authority in the usual way. Whether these are made to Scottish Ministers or to the Council, officers will summarise representations received in their report to Committee and consider the

issues raised in coming to a recommendation. In this way the Council recognises the community voice and ensures that it is given the appropriate focus and attention.

It would not be appropriate for the Council, given its role in decision making, to provide support to communities beyond that set out within legislation.

## **2. Ms D Peacock**

To the Leader

Context: SSEN has a statutory obligation to conduct “meaningful consultation” with stakeholders who might be affected by its proposed developments. The Scottish Government states that “Engaging with citizens and stakeholder organisations in order to influence policy making is a key part of the Scottish Approach and is fully supported by ministers”. The Gunning Principles were established in 1985 to provide some definition of what is required to constitute “meaningful consultation”.

SSEN has consistently failed to follow these principles and has NOT conducted “meaningful consultation”. Instead, it has been applying a wilful policy of “decide and defend”. On 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024 five Community Councils in the Beauly area refused to continue to participate in routine liaison meetings with SSEN – which had been going on for more than 10 years – due to the superficial nature of SSEN’s approach to meaningful consultation. SSEN’s failure to consult meaningfully was also highlighted and recognised during the debate following Motion S6M-12842 in the Scottish Parliament on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

How does Highland Council propose to address the consequences of SSEN’s failure to follow its statutory duty to conduct meaningful consultation, as this failure on SSEN’s part has left communities without any effective input to assessment of what may – or what may not – be acceptable in development of the electricity distribution network necessary to meet foreseeable future energy demand?

The Council has no direct influence over the public consultation that SSEN, or any other developer, may decide to undertake. At best the Council can only suggest what form it may take and who should be included as set out in Planning Circular 3/2022. It is for SSEN, or any other developer, to determine how to undertake its own consultation.

## **3. Mr I Lyons**

To the Leader

Tourism is a vital source of income, of employment, and of economic activity in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. The Draft Sustainable Tourism Strategy discussed at the Highland Council meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 confirmed that tourism attracts circa 7 million visitors per annum to the region, generates around £1.6 billion of economic income, and supports around 25,000 jobs. The Draft Strategy also places much emphasis on the importance of the unspoiled natural environment in making the most of current and future tourism opportunities. According to the Nation Brands Index 2023, “... a country’s natural beauty is the most important reputational aspect driving the desire to visit a nation.”

Given the economic importance of tourism for the area, and the significance of our unspoiled natural environment to continuing to attract visitors to the area:

What steps has the council taken to measure and mitigate the impact of the proposed new electricity supply infrastructure including the multiple new overhead pylon lines and new substation proposals, on the communities affected – particularly in relation to business and employment opportunities for the local businesses that rely on tourism.

As you identified in the draft Sustainable Tourism Strategy, the Council recognises the importance of the landscape and natural environment to the tourism sector. At a national level, several major studies have shown there to be no significant correlation between renewable energy development and a negative impact on tourism. In part, this is a result of the rigorous planning process which should prevent inappropriate development and ensures that each renewable energy application is properly assessed. This typically includes the applicant undertaking an Environmental Impact Assessment which, amongst other things, sets out in detail the impact a development would have on the landscape and environment but also the visual effects from key destinations and travel routes. A central consideration of this assessment is the cumulative impact of development, which takes account of other renewable energy developments.

## **Member Questions**

### **4. Mr A Christie**

To the Leader

At Council on the 9<sup>th</sup> May I asked what processes and briefings you could put in place to ensure that all Councillors were up to date with what is happening at Cosla. You undertook to look into the matter and I should be grateful if you could now update us all as to what solutions you have to address this matter.

I have written to the President of COSLA to ask if she would consider options which would enable Members to have a greater awareness of decisions taken at meetings of COSLA Leaders.

### **5. Mr A Christie**

To the Leader

Please could the leader detail by school establishment all vacant teaching posts?

The Workforce Planning and Area Teams within the Education and Learning Service have been working very closely with Head Teachers since the start of the year to plan and recruit the teachers required to meet the needs of all Highland schools for the start of the new session in August.

All secondary staffing was agreed following meetings held with Head Teachers in term one, with recruitment commencing before the Easter holidays. 24 probationer teachers have been allocated to secondary schools as part of the national Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS) and will take-up post from August. Currently there are 26

secondary teaching posts advertised across all secondary schools with a closing date of Monday 24 June, the following provides the details per school.

Job Title	Location	Contract Type	Position Type	Job Closing Date
Teacher (Secondary), Drama, 14 hours per week Start date 19/08/2024	Culloden Academy	Permanent	Part Time	24/06/2024
Principal Teacher (Secondary), Guidance,	Culloden Academy	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Primary), (ASN), 21 hours per week, Fixed Term from 19/08/2024 until 03/07/2025	Glenurquhart Primary School	Fixed Term	Part Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary) English and ASN, Maternity Cover	Golspie High School	Fixed Term	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary), Mathematics	Grantown Grammar School	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary), Maths, Inverness High School, Start date 19/08/2024	Inverness High School	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (ASN), Fixed Term from 19/08/24 until June 2025	Kingussie High School	Fixed Term	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary), History	Kinlochleven High School	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary), English	Kinlochleven High School	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary), Mathematics,	Kinlochleven High School	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary), Gaelic	Lochaber High School	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary) History or History/Modern Studies,	Mallaig High School	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary) ASN, Fixed Term from 19/08/2024 to 03/07/2025	Millburn Academy	Fixed Term	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary), Pupil Equity Outreach Teacher, Fixed Term until June 2025	Nairn Academy	Fixed Term	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary), Gaelic Medium, 17.5 hours per week, Fixed	Nairn Academy	Fixed Term	Part Time	24/06/2024

Term from 19/08/2024 until 02/06/2025				
Teacher (Secondary), Chemistry	Plockton High School	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary) Physical Education, 21 hours per week,	Plockton High School	Permanent	Part Time	24/06/2024
Principal Teacher (Secondary) Mathematics & Numeracy	Portree High School	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (ASN), Additional Support Needs, Fixed Term from 19/08/2024 until 03/07/2025	Portree High School	Fixed Term	Full Time	24/06/2024
Principal Teacher (Secondary), English,	Tain Royal Academy	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary) Maths	Tain Royal Academy	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary), Gaelic Medium, 21 hours per week	Tain Royal Academy	Permanent	Part Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary) Business Studies, Maternity Cover from 02/09/2024 until 30/05/2025	Thurso High School	Fixed Term	Full Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary), Modern Studies	Thurso High School	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024
Principal Teacher (Secondary), English, Modern Languages and Gaelic, 11.9 Hours per week, maternity cover for 1 year	Thurso High School	Fixed Term	Part Time	24/06/2024
Teacher (Secondary) English	Wick High School,	Permanent	Full Time	24/06/2024

There are currently 25 primary teaching vacancies and we would expect appointments to be made to these before the summer break. Primary recruitment to date has been going well, with large numbers of applications being received for advertised posts and all permanent vacancies arising so far this term have been filled.

The fixed term primary posts that are currently vacant, and set out below, are to cover of a variety of temporary arrangements in schools such as:

- Maternity Leave
- Management time for promoted staff and ELC
- Probationer cover (for their day out of class)
- Class contact reduction cover
- PEF funded post

- Temporary vacancies related to school roll

SCHOOL	VACANCY FTE / HOURS	PERM / FIXED TERM	FIXED TERM END DATE
Ballachulish Primary	0.5FTE / 17.5 hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Beauly Primary	0.4FTE / 14 hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Bridgend Primary	0.5FTE / 17.5 hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Caol Primary	1.5 FTE	Fixed Term	Until return of teachers
Cradlehall Primary	0.5fte / 17.5 hrs	Fixed Term	Until return of teacher
Culbokie Primary	0.2 / 7 hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Duror Primary	0.1fte / 3.5hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Glencoe Primary	0.8FTE/ 28 hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Golspie Primary	0.4 fte / 14hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Grantown Primary	2.5 FTE	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Inshes Primary	0.4fte / 14 hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Inver Primary	1.1 FTE	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Inverlochry Primary	1 / 35 hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Kinmylies Primary	0.1fte / 3.5hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Lundavra Primary	1 FTE / 35 hrs	Fixed Term	Until return of teacher
North Kessock	0.5fte / 17.5hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Noss Primary	0.5fte / 17.5hrs	Fixed Term	13/10/2024
Obsdale Primary	0.7 FTE / 24.5 hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Raigmore Primary	0.4 fte / 14hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
South Lodge	1fte / 35 hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Spean Bridge Primary	0.3fte / 10.5hrs	Fixed Term	Until return of teacher
St Brides	0.4 fte / 14hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Staffin Primary	0.2fte / 7hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Tarradale Primary	0.2fte / 7hrs	Fixed Term	03/07/2025
Tore Primary	0.2fte / 7hrs	Fixed Term	11/10/2024

## 6. Mr P Logue

To the Chair of Economy and Infrastructure

What is the Council's position is on the spacing of caravans on council premises, including car parks, bearing in mind SFRS guidance stating that caravans should be at least 6 metres apart and well away from parked cars.

The Council prohibit all caravans from staying overnight in regulated Council car parks and indeed during the day in most car parks. In addition, most Council car parks "prohibit the parking of vehicle manufactured or adapted for the purpose of sleeping between 10pm and 8am". There are Motorhome overnight short stays at a few locations in Highland purely on the basis of parking of the vehicles.

We recognise that Camping & Caravan sites have a concentration of the number of vehicles/caravans using onboard cooking facilities that increases the likelihood of a combustion event taking place therefore the mitigations are in place of increased spacing as advised by SFRS through the campsite license.

## **7. Mr R Stewart**

To the Chair of Education

In Light of the Cass Report's recommendations on the best-evidenced care for gender-distressed children, could the Chair of Education address whether the council will now withdraw the Scottish Government's "Supporting Transgender Pupils in Schools: Guidance for Scottish Schools," which advises affirmation for gender distressed children and leads to staff socially transitioning children, and issue new guidance?

The Highland Council follows Scottish Government advice on matters relating to education. We understand that reviews are being undertaken in the light of the recommendations from the final Cass Report and if updated guidance and advice is published, we will share that with our schools and ensure they are familiar with any changes made.

## **8. Mr D Gregg**

To the Chair of Education

One of my residents requested a deferral for their child starting primary school.

Two months later, they asked for a timetable for when they'd get a decision. Two months later, they finally got a response confirming deferral had been approved.

By this time, their child had started the transition process to secondary school, despite the parents wishes for deferral. The length of time, and lack of adequate communication from the council, has distressed them and their child at a very important time of their child's life. It is unacceptable it took four months to give these parents a decision, and unacceptable to not even give them a date for when they might hear.

Please could the council provide details of the average length of time it is taking us to process parental requests for deferring their child's entry into P1 either by ASG, or an alternative geographic breakdown if more convenient.

Whilst I can't comment on individual cases, I can set out the legislative and policy requirements, the process for applying for deferral, and explain why timescales can vary.

Under current legislation, parents of children aged 4 years old at the start of the school session in August (i.e. those with their 5th birthday on or after the first day of term in August and up to the end of February the following year) have the option to request deferred entry to for primary school. These children can start school before they are 5 or can defer their start until the following August. Deferred places for these children are approved on request without need for assessment or delay. Some parents chose to enrol for both school and ELC to make the decision nearer to school start date,

However, for those children whose school entry is significantly deferred i.e. those for whom deferral will make them 6 years old prior to the first day of term on the following year, there is a requirement to undertake further assessment. Initially, if parents/ carers are concerned about whether or not their child is ready for school, they should speak directly to the staff who care for their child and/or to the Head Teacher or

Manager of the ELC setting their child attends. If a deferral is still sought, an individual assessment has to be made of each application.

Assessment at this stage is completed by staff in the ELC setting, working alongside the Early Years Education Support Officer, who is tasked to ensure the child's assessment record is backed by evidence that shows the areas of immaturity and development. The Educated Out-with Your Peer Group policy states a request for assistance and advice must also be made to the Educational Psychology Service, to ensure that an Educational Psychologist can add to the assessment process and can be consulted on the decision to defer, with involvement requested in good time. This assessment information is gathered as quickly as possible to enable a decision to be made for parents/carers and for the school or ELC setting, but this can vary depending on the level of assessment information required for each individual child.

It is not possible to give an average time for how long it can take for a decision to be made as this information is not collated centrally. However, the time taken can vary widely as it depends on the individual circumstances of the child involved. The intention is to do this as quickly as possible and timeously to support any transition to school or to remain in ELC.

Concerns or complaints about individual cases should be raised with the Service.

## **9. Mr R Gale**

To the Chair of Education

Following the release of the joint statement (see below) from the various teaching unions relating to the call upon the Scottish Government and Local Authorities to ensure that the needs of our most vulnerable children are fully met. Can you confirm that you endorse their efforts on this matter and agree with the views they have put forward in the statement?

### ***Joint Statement on Additional Support Needs (ASN)***

***We support the Scottish Government's commitment to 'getting it right for every child' to provide all children, young people and their families with the right support at the right time; so that every child and young person in Scotland can reach their full potential.***

***1 The Education (ASL) (Scotland) Act 2004 places various duties on education authorities related to the provision of school education for children and young people with additional support needs belonging to their area. Education authorities must:***

- make adequate and efficient provision for the additional support required for each child or young person with additional support needs for whose school education they are responsible.***
- make arrangements to identify additional support needs.***
- keep under consideration the additional support needs identified and the adequacy of support provided to meet the needs of each child or young person.***

***2 We, the undersigned, record our concern that the proportion of Scotland's pupils with an identified Additional Support Need (ASN) has risen from 6.5% in 2009 to 37% in 2023 without a corresponding increase in resources to support this level of need. We have seen the level and complexity of additional support needs grow, whilst poverty continues to extend its crippling grip across families in Scotland, intensifying in the midst of the cost-of-living crisis, with hunger, fuel and digital poverty now impacting more than one in three children in some areas. We believe that the Scottish Government has not provided sufficient funding to allow local authorities to make***



*adequate and efficient provision for the additional support required for each child or young person with additional support needs.*

- 3** *The current climate of under-investment in Additional Support for Learning is now having an impact across the whole learning population and is detrimental to the wellbeing of children and young people; the wellbeing of school staff; and the educational experience for many pupils.*

*The final report of the National Discussion on Education highlighted the imperative for 'adequate sustained funding to provide staffing and specialist resources to be able to achieve the commitment to inclusivity and [meet] the needs of each learner, with a particular urgency for children and young people identified as having Additional Support Needs'. Yet we continue to witness efforts to evade discourse around the crucial issue of resourcing.*

*The Scottish Government and education authorities must face up to the challenge and invest in Scottish Education to deliver the promises of inclusive practice made to young people and their families twenty years ago and which continues to be framed in current legislation.*

*We call on the Scottish Government and all education authorities to put in place the requisite additional staffing and resources to fully implement the relevant legal duties and commitments in practice for all pupils with additional support needs, and in so doing, improve the quality of education provision and wellbeing for those children and young people, and improve the working conditions, health, safety and wellbeing of the teachers and support staff who work with them.*

*1 <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/> 2 . <https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-childrens-learning-statutory-guidance-educationadditional-support-learning-scotland/pages/2/>*

*Co-signatories of the Joint Statement on ASN.*

*AHDS: Greg Dempster, General Secretary*

*Connect: Gavin Yates, Executive Director*

*EIS: Andrea Bradley, General Secretary*

*Glasgow City Parents Group: Leanne McGuire, Chairperson*

*GMB: Keir Greenaway, Scotland senior organiser in public services*

*NASUWT: Mike Corbett, NASUWT Scotland Official*

*NPFS: Cheryl Burnett, Chair, NPFS*

*SLS: Graham Hutton, General Secretary*

*SSTA: Seamus Searson, General Secretary*

*UNISON Lilian Macer, Scotland Regional Secretary*

*UNITE Graham McNab, Lead Officer, Local Authorities.*

I fully support the Scottish Government's and our commitment to 'getting it right for every child' and await the Scottish Government's response the National Discussion on Education with specific reference to resourcing of Additional Support Needs.

## **10. Mr A Graham**

To the Leader

Charleston Academy: The inclusion of the Academy in the Highland Investment Plan as a Phase One, Years 1-10 project with potential delivery within 3 to 5 years, subject to the availability and profiling of funding, was very encouraging after the acute disappointment when the Capital Programme was revised in September 2023.

Can you advise what steps are now being taken with the design and construction in order to achieve delivery within the 3 to 5 years' timescale?

Work is underway on the Charleston masterplan design for a community hub new build. The design is at RIBA Stage 2 and is waiting for M&E/ MEP (mechanical & engineering/ mechanical, electrical and plumbing) input to further the design. The new school will be co-located at the existing school site thus avoiding decant of the existing school during build. A range of work is being undertaken at the existing school in the meantime while awaiting the new build – internal works, internal redecoration, roof works, etc.

#### **11. Mr Ballance**

To the Leader

Have you signed the Highland NHS' Charter for Climate, Nature and Health?

To date we have not signed the Charter.

I am aware that we have recently agreed the Council's first Ecology Strategy and it may be that this document could act as our pledge should the Council decide to sign the charter.

#### **12. Mrs I MacKenzie**

To the Leader

I ask that the Highland Council consider installing bins for compostable items situated in Inverness, which then can be put to a composting site here, the compost can then be used locally. As all compostable items are either currently put to general waste or cups are collected at additional cost and sent down the road to Central belt or further.

The waste service change that is currently being rolled out is expanding the collection of organic waste (food) to around 60k households, this will result in diverting significant food waste tonnage from the general waste stream.

Existing waste composition analysis data does not show that there is any significant other compostable packaging items being placed into general waste.

The purpose of service change is to modernise the Council's collection service, by improving and optimising our performance, the treatment contracts in place reflect this. Any separate collection of compostable packaging would provide extremely low yield and it would be costly to collect. There is currently insufficient public awareness concerning compostable packaging standards, (the difference between biodegradable and compostable packaging) for this reason, any separate collection would also likely be low in quality.

#### **13. Mr R MacKintosh**

To the Leader

Please list the annual amount spent by Highland Council from its own funds, annually, each year from 2021 and for 2019/20, the last year before covid.

The Council's Annual Accounts provides information on the Council's income and expenditures in each year, and these can be accessed at [Annual accounts](#).