

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 4 June 2025 at 9.35 am.

Present:

Ms S Atkin	Ms M Hutchison
Mrs I Campbell (remote)	Ms L Johnston (remote)
Mr A Christie	Ms K MacLean (substitute)
Mrs M Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Ms H Crawford (remote)	Mr J McGillivray (remote)
Ms S Fanet (remote)	Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mrs M Ross (substitute)
Mr R Gale	Mr R Stewart (remote)
Mr J Grafton	

Religious Representatives (non-voting):

Rev C Caley
Ms S Lamont

Youth Convener (non-voting):

Ms L McKittrick (remote)

Non-Members also present:

Mr A Baxter	Ms E Knox (remote)
Mr R Bremner (remote)	Mr B Lobban (remote)
Mr D Fraser (remote)	Mr G MacKenzie (remote)
Mr K Gowans	Mrs A MacLean (remote)
Dr M Gregson	Mrs M Paterson (remote)
Mr R Jones (remote)	Mrs T Robertson (remote)

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People
Ms F Grant, Chief Officer – Secondary Education
Ms B Scott, Chief Officer – Early Years and Primary Education (remote)
Ms A Jansson, Interim Chief Officer – Early Years and Primary Education
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer – Integrated People Services
Ms A MacPherson, Strategic Lead – Resources
Mr R Campbell, Service Lead - Capital Planning and Estate Strategy
Mr D Martin, Principal Education Officer
Mr I Jackson, Education Officer
Ms B Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist
Mr I Kyle, Head of Performance and Improvement
Ms H Brown, Senior Manager Early Years
Ms M Garson, Senior Lead, Employability and Skills 3-18
Mrs F Shearer, Area Education and Learning Manager (South)
Ms F Dalgetty, Chief Executive, Fèis Rois (Third Sector)
Ms G Rodger, Chief Officer, Inspiring Young Voices (Third Sector)
Ms M Chemonges, Highland Parent Council Partnership
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland

Mr N Bolton, Head of Music Development, 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

Business

1. Calling of the Roll and Apologies for Absence

Gairm a' Chlàir agus Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms L Dundas, Ms L Kraft and Ms M MacCallum.

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 11: Mr K Gowans

Item 12: Mr A Christie

Item 13: Mrs M Ross

The following Members made general Transparency Statements but, having applied the objective test, did not consider that they had an interest to declare:-

Mr J McGillivray, on the basis that he was still registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, and as a retired member and former Highland District Secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association.

Mr R Stewart, on the basis that a close family member was employed by the Highland Council.

Mr D Macpherson, on the basis that a close family member was a Primary School Teacher.

3. Good News/Outstanding Achievements

Naidheachdan Matha/Coileanaidhean Air Leth

A presentation on outstanding achievements by pupils and schools had been circulated.

Having congratulated all schools included in the presentation for the wide variety of achievements, the Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

4. Statutory Consultation: Relocation of St Clement's School **Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Ath-shuidheachadh Sgoil Naoimh Cliamhainn**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/9/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In introducing the report, it was confirmed that the date of the public meeting, which it was indicated in the report would be finalised following engagement with St Clement's Parent Council, would be Wednesday 2 July 2025.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- information was sought, and provided, on a number of points including how the estimated cost of £50m at section 3.1 of the report had been arrived at and whether it was considered to be a realistic figure; how many other agencies would be working within the community POD (Point of Delivery); what security arrangements would be put in place, particularly at St Clement's School given it was a Special School; and which Special Schools St Clement's would be benchmarked against;
- given the broad catchment area of St Clement's School, it was welcomed that consultation with Elected Members would be wider than just the Dingwall and Seaforth Ward. It was also welcomed that the consultation would be made available to parents of pre-school pupils;
- it was good to see progress being made with regard to St Clement's School. However, the need for pace was emphasised given increasing construction costs;
- it was important to listen to the views of the community, and to get the new St Clement's School right;
- an assurance was sought, and provided, that all members of Council staff who would be working within the POD would have the appropriate PVG (Protecting Vulnerable Groups) or disclosure checks;
- St Clement's School community had experienced many false dawns in the past, and the statutory consultation needed to be handled with care as some parents felt marginalised and that their views were not always taken into account. Concern was expressed regarding meetings taking place during the school holidays, and the need to ensure people were not excluded simply because they were taking a much-needed break was emphasised. It was important to reflect, at every stage of the consultation, on whether everyone was being given the opportunity to engage and whether things were moving in a positive direction. In responding to the points raised, the Assistant Chief Executive recognised the importance of all stakeholders having the opportunity to engage in a way that was appropriate for them and their needs, and she summarised the process that would be followed. In particular, it was explained that the public meeting was taking place on 2 July as that was when parents had indicated would work best for them, and it would be a hybrid meeting. There would be no in-person engagement over the school holidays as it was recognised that that was a difficult time for people, and Members were asked to contact officers if anyone felt they were being marginalised at any time so they could be drawn into the process;
- tribute was paid to the parents who had campaigned, over a number of years, for a new St Clement's School
- the facilities at the new St Duthus Special School in Tain, which was nearing completion, were commended, and should give confidence to Members regarding the new St Clement's School; and

- thanks were expressed to all involved for the work that had been done with regard to St Clement's School.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation, based on the proposal attached to the report at Appendix 1.

5. **Statutory Consultation: Closure of Badcaul Primary School – Final Report** **Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Dùnadh Bun-Sgoil a' Bhad Chall – Aithisg Dheireannach**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/10/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- an issue that had caused consternation at the public meeting and subsequently was the proposal to transfer the catchment to Ullapool Primary School, which was 31 miles from Badcaul. There was another school, Bualnaluib Primary School, 13 miles away which it was suggested would provide a more attractive proposition to families that might move to the area, and it was queried whether it was possible for the catchment area to be looked at again, if required. In response, it was explained that the parents who had moved their children in January 2022 had chosen Ullapool Primary School rather than Bualnaluib. It was confirmed it could be possible to change the catchment, however, a full statutory consultation would be required. It was added that Bualnaluib Primary School was part of the Gairloch Associated School Group so any change to the catchment would also require changes to Gairloch High School and Ullapool High School catchment areas;
- there were positive developments to look forward to in the Badcaul community and, while the recommendation was for the school to close, it was not impossible that there would be a school there in the future. It was necessary to think much more creatively, as was already happening with Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) provision;
- continued mothballing would mean the school building would remain closed and unused, potentially for years, which created uncertainties and did not galvanise community spirit. It was suggested there was potential for the community to lease the building and bring it back to life, which would create a sense of hope and positivity;
- in relation to the Integrated Impact Assessment, the conclusion that there was no impact on children and young people was questioned, and it was suggested there was a significant impact on the young people who had to make a 60-mile round trip to Ullapool. In response, it was explained that Badcaul Primary School had been mothballed since January 2022. Closing the school would do no more than formalise the current situation on the ground so, in that sense, there was no impact on local children;
- children from Badcaul attending school in Ullapool would be bound by school transport and would be unable to take part in after-school activities without private transport, and it was queried whether transport provision could be looked at with a view to allowing the children to participate in activities and feel more socially included in Ullapool. The Chair confirmed such discussions could take place if required, citing examples in Skye whereby school transport left later on certain days of the week to facilitate young people taking part in extra-curricular activities;

- it was queried what the minimum number of pupils would be for opening a new school to be viable if the community had a resurgence in the future. In that regard, the Chair confirmed that officers had looked at school roll projections and would look at them again should there be an influx of young people in the area;
- sympathy was expressed for the plight of the Badcaul community, four schools having closed in Sutherland over the last eight years. Edderton Primary School now faced the prospect of mothballing, and it was commented that depopulation was no longer confined to rural areas in the north and west but was having an impact close to the Inner Moray Firth. Thanks were expressed to the Chair and the Assistant Chief Executive – People for their assurances that Edderton Primary School premises would be maintained in a fit and proper state, ready to re-open when the school roll increased, and that the school would be actively promoted for enrolment in the spring of 2026 for academic session 2026/27;
- schools were the heart of a community, not just a place for education but a crucial part of the social and economic fabric, particularly in rural communities where they were a hub for local activities. Closing Badcaul Primary School would be to remove one of the few remaining community assets and would reduce the attractiveness of the community to families looking to move to the area. In that regard, reference was made to the closure of Kentallen School in the 1960s whereby families with young children had largely stopped settling in that area. In recent years remote working had increased the appeal of living in rural areas, and it was important not to discourage families from moving into a community;
- closing schools went directly against the Council's aim of addressing rural depopulation;
- keeping schools open was essential for sustaining multi-generational communities, and Education Scotland had recognised the value of small school settings;
- it was not considered that closing the school would generate significant financial savings. In response, it was explained that the proposal had not been advanced on the basis of financial savings but on the viability of the school;
- if the school closed and the local population increased in the future, the Council would have to provide a new school or increase transport subsidies, and it was suggested that the recommendation was short-sighted with potential long-term consequences;
- closing the school would lead to housing developments struggling to attract young families, and children having longer daily commutes, and it was suggested that the Council should instead work with residents and explore suitable alternatives until it could perhaps reopen;
- small schools provided high-quality personalised learning, which was important for attainment;
- transporting children to Ullapool by bus did not align with the Council's environmental goals as it led to more emissions and did not promote active travel. It also meant that children were away from home for longer than they needed to be;
- it was important to make a decision based on the facts in the report in terms of the very low number of school and pre-school children in the Badcaul community;
- it was queried whether it was the case that the status of mothballed schools was reviewed annually;
- it was commented that two children from Badcaul attended Ullapool Primary School at present. However, they were there by parental choice;
- thanks were expressed to officers for the time taken to clarify points and provide additional information to Members; and

- whilst the reasoning behind the recommendation in the report was understood, it was intended to move an amendment seeking to allow time for current developments to progress, and for all those involved to work together to build community resilience, capacity and agency. When families were looking to relocate, access to primary education and childcare were often a first consideration. Currently there were no early years children in the Badcaul Primary School catchment area but, looking ahead, the pre-school children of today would require ELC in a year or two and primary education a couple of years later. It was hoped that community-led action would change the current outlook. Currently, children were required to travel for over an hour, depending on the conditions. The first part of the journey was on a challenging road, and particularly difficult in wintry conditions. Children as young as four years old would have to travel unaccompanied and change buses in a siding on the way. It was questioned how many Members would be happy for their very young children to undertake such a journey, setting off at 7.40 am and not returning until 4.30 pm. Developments in the area were being progressed by SSEN and Wester Ross Fisheries whose letter of support stated that “recruitment is challenging in the Highlands due to the relocation of individuals and families to larger cities. In order to ensure we have a viable workforce in a remote location, Badcaul Primary School is vital in providing the community foundation that families look for when relocating”. Communities Housing Trust had carried out a housing needs survey in October 2022 and had conducted a community engagement event to explore suitable sites for an affordable housing development. They had narrowed the options down to a site opposite the school. Communities Housing Trust had stated that “the provision of education and housing in fragile rural areas have both been identified as key elements in the 2024 Scottish Government paper on population decline. Communities Housing Trust would support delaying a decision to close Badcaul Primary School whilst other opportunities, including affordable housing, are allowed to develop.” Closure of the school would have long-term implications for Badcaul and Wester Ross, and it was believed the decision had Highland-wide implications. If the Council was serious about supporting fragile communities towards regeneration and sustainability, it was necessary to create opportunities and plan for repopulation. An extended period of mothballing would give time for change and positive impacts of developments to address the overarching threat of depopulation.

Thereafter, Mr J Finlayson, seconded by Mr D Millar, **MOVED** the recommendations in the report, namely, that the Committee agree to recommend that the Highland Council discontinue education at Badcaul Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Ullapool Primary School.

As an **AMENDMENT**, Ms M Hutchison, seconded by Mr R Gale, moved that the Committee recommend a further period of mothballing for Badcaul Primary School. Since the report was published the outlook has changed.

- Most importantly, there is a small group of pre-school children in the area who will soon be entitled to statutory ELC.
- The construction of a major fish farm facility is well underway at Badcaul and should be operational this year, offering new employment opportunities.
- A community housing project is ongoing.
- Local estates, the Community Council and the local development trust have voiced their opposition to closure of the school.

Another period of mothballing would allow all stakeholders to work alongside the community, help it to thrive and support the Council's commitment to address depopulation.

On a vote being taken, the **MOTION** received 8 votes and the **AMENDMENT** received 9 votes, with no abstentions. The **AMENDMENT** was therefore **CARRIED**, the votes having been cast as follows:-

For the Motion:

Ms S Atkin, Mrs I Campbell, Mrs M Cockburn, Mr J Finlayson, Ms L Johnston, Ms K MacLean, Mr D Millar, Mrs M Ross.

For the Amendment:

Mr A Christie, Mrs H Crawford, Ms S Fanet, Mr R Gale, Ms M Hutchison, Mr J Grafton, Mr D Macpherson, Mr J McGillivray, Mr R Stewart.

Decision

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council a further period of mothballing for Badcaul Primary School. Since the report was published the outlook has changed.
 - Most importantly, there is a small group of pre-school children in the area who will soon be entitled to statutory ELC.
 - The construction of a major fish farm facility is well underway at Badcaul and should be operational this year, offering new employment opportunities.
 - A community housing project is ongoing.
 - Local estates, the Community Council and the local development trust have voiced their opposition to closure of the school.

Another period of mothballing would allow all stakeholders to work alongside the community, help it to thrive and support the Council's commitment to address depopulation.

6. **Statutory Consultation: Merger of School Nurseries at Caol Primary School and St Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, to create a new pre-school provision serving both schools**
Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Cur còmhla Sgoiltean-àraich aig Bun-Sgoil a' Chaoil agus Bun-Sgoil Chaitligeach Cholm Cille, gus solar ùr ro-sgoile a chruthachadh a bhios a' frithealadh an dà sgoil

There had been circulated Report No EDU/11/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that the school nurseries at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School be merged to create a new pre-school provision serving both schools.

**7. Statutory Consultation: Closure of Kinlochewe Primary School – Final Report
Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Dùnadh Bun-Sgoil Cheann Loch Iù – Aithisg
Dheireannach**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/12/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** that the Highland Council discontinue education at Kinlochewe Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Gairloch Primary School.

**8. Statutory Consultation: Creation of Gaelic Medium Catchment Areas for
Craighill Primary School and Tain Royal Academy
Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Cruthachadh Sgìrean-sgoile Foghlaim tron
Ghàidhlig airson Bun-Sgoil Chnoc na Creige agus Acadamaidh Rìoghail Bhaile
Dhubhthaich**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/13/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council the creation of Gaelic Medium catchment areas in line with the proposal set out at paragraph 1.2 above, namely, overlaying the current English Medium catchments of all primary schools within the Associated School Groups of Tain Royal Academy, Invergordon Academy, Dornoch Academy and Golspie High School.

**9. Service Performance Reporting for Quarter 4 2024/25
Aithris Coileanadh Seirbheis airson Ràith 4 2024/25**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/14/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- with reference to section 8.3 of the report, it having been queried why two ends of the educational spectrum had been included in the same intensive programme, it was confirmed that there were two distinct projects sitting within the workstream;
- information was sought, and provided, on what was being done to encourage more staff to undertake GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child) training;
- in relation to the table on page 333 of the papers, several indicators referred to an annual update in February, and it would be useful, in future reports, to indicate which year the annual update covered; and
- with reference to the indicators relating to Complementary Tariff Scores, it was queried whether the figures represented the number of pupils involved. The Chief Officer – Secondary Education undertook to revert to Mr A Christie in that regard.

The Committee scrutinised and **APPROVED**:-

- i. the Service's performance and risk information;
- ii. the update on the Workforce for the Future Portfolio at section 9; and
- iii. the actions taken following an internal audit of financial procedures in schools at section 10 of the report.

10. Improving Relationships and Behaviour in Schools Action Plan – Update Plana-gnìomha airson Dàimhean agus Modh-giùlain a Leasachadh ann an Sgoiltean – Cunntas às Ùr

There had been circulated Report No EDU/15/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the report was a follow-up to the recent Members' workshop, and he thanked those Members who had attended the workshop and provided helpful and insightful feedback. The report provided information on both the national work taking place and what was happening in Highland.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was recognised that keeping staff safe and managing children was often a fine balancing act within the school setting, and how quickly children who did not have good emotional intelligence could misinterpret cues. Information was sought, and provided, on how the actions being taken contributed to keeping staff members safe from physical violence at work, and whether interventions included restraint, whether figures were available in that regard and whether parents were informed;
- the recent Members' workshop had provided valuable insight and background to the statistics on behaviour in schools;
- it appeared that a small number of pupils were causing the majority of the issues, and it was questioned whether these pupils were suitable for the mainstream school environment;
- anecdotally, Members had heard that schools were a violent unsafe place for learners, and a request was made for more reporting on violence by pupils towards other pupils. In addition, reference was made to a survey by the Teachers' Union, NASUWT, that had identified issues in terms of violence and the use of vapes, alcohol, energy drinks and illegal drugs in schools, and it was necessary to take a holistic view of the issues to understand how best to tackle them. Other Members disputed the comment that schools were violent and unsafe, stating it was scaremongering and misrepresented children in Highland. 613 pupils out of approximately 31,000, less than 2%, had been involved in pupil-staff incidents in the last school session. 85% of incidents involved children with ASN, and 28% of incidents were in P1. Schools in Highland were amongst the safest in the country if not the UK and, as evidenced by the Lifestyle Survey, children felt safe in schools. It was necessary to get matters into perspective and accept that all staff involved were doing a good job in trying to address some of the challenges children faced, which had been heightened since Covid;
- information was sought, and provided, on what support was put in place for teachers in terms of how to handle situations whereby they were verbally or physically attacked, and what support was provided for children in the playground to ensure it was a safe environment for them to play in;
- it was welcomed that a survey of school staff had been carried out, and the finding that staff felt time and sufficient staffing levels could have a considerable effect on their ability to manage classes and meet pupils' needs was consistent with reports from constituents that staff, including support staff, were insufficient in number and did not have time to deal with their caseload;
- given 85% of incidents involved children with Additional Support Needs (ASN), it was questioned whether enough was being done to integrate children with ASN

into the mainstream school system, and it was suggested it might be necessary to look again at the approach being taken;

- in terms of emotional dysregulation, it was highlighted that autistic people processed emotionally so it was not necessarily dysregulation in some cases;
- offers to train could give the impression that teachers were responsible, and it was important children understood they were responsible for their behaviour;
- the statement in the report that it was unlikely that one approach would address all issues was welcomed. It was important to accept that some approaches, including restorative practice, might sometimes not work. In that regard, reference was made to advice provided by NASUWT which stated that “a range of approaches and consequences are required given that restorative approaches to poor behaviour do not work for all pupils and cannot be the only tool available to schools when responding to incidents of abuse or violence”, and it was hoped this would be taken on board;
- it was welcomed that references had been provided at the end of the report, and it was suggested that more reports should include information on sources;
- the importance of taking a whole family approach was emphasised;
- it was questioned whether teachers dealing with challenging incidents always had time to report them, and information was sought, and provided, on how robust the reporting process was considered to be, and whether there was any indication from Head Teachers as to how many unreported incidents there might be due to pressure of work;
- it was necessary to engage with parents, carers and the wider school community to understand the social, economic and emotional factors that might be impacting on children’s behaviour;
- with reference to long waiting lists for child psychologist appointments, it was queried whether additional support could be put in place prior to formal diagnosis of specific conditions such as Autism or Dyslexia which were often evident to teaching staff;
- the importance of early intervention and parental responsibility was emphasised;
- reference was made to instances of teachers feeling pressure to not exclude a child from school when they felt it was the solution, and to teachers being absent from work due to stress related to the behaviour of particular children, and it was questioned what could be done to make things better for children, families and teaching staff;
- restorative practice was reputed to be a “soft option” but it was quite difficult for children to face up to the consequences of their actions and, done properly, restorative practice could be transformative;
- with reference to section 7.1 of the report, the percentage of Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) that responded to the survey of school staff was quite low, and the importance of the voice of PSAs was emphasised as they dealt with many challenging incidents;
- whilst sanctions and punishments were not generally considered to be helpful in supporting distressed children, boundaries and consequences, and a sense of fairness, were important;
- with reference to section 7.9 of the report, the way someone spoke, not only to a child but to anyone, mattered, and there should be a whole school approach in that regard;
- it was hoped that data would determine where resources were targeted;

- as indicated in section 7.11 of the report, hunger had a huge impact on how children behaved, and something as simple as extending morning break by five minutes to allow children to eat could be transformative;
- the Chief Executive, Fèis Rois, suggested there was an opportunity to have a discussion around collaboration between the Council and third sector partners, adding that children and young people often had trusted relationships with youth workers outwith school, for example, through arts and sports clubs. From a Fèis Rois perspective, it was striking that 85% of incidents involved children with ASN. There were numerous academic papers on the impact of music, particularly singing and group singing, in supporting children with language development, speech, language communication and emotional regulation, and it was suggested there could be opportunities to pilot initiatives such as having a musician in residence in early years settings and P1. It was highlighted that Fèis Rois had recently held a whole day of training with a clinical psychiatrist from NHS Highland for musicians working in schools because they had reported seeing behaviour in primary schools that they had not seen pre-pandemic. In addition, £165,000 of funding had been secured to work with nine primary schools in the Highlands and 19 class teachers over the next two years on a project specifically looking at using music as a way of improving health and wellbeing outcomes for primary school children; and
- disappointment was expressed that the Committee's religious representatives had not been made aware of the Members' workshop, and it was requested they be notified of future workshops relating to education. The Chair apologised for the oversight, and confirmed the presentation from the workshop could be circulated and the Principal Educational Psychologist would be happy to have a discussion with the religious representatives.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the work ongoing nationally in supporting better relationships and behaviour in schools;
- NOTED** the evidence base that supported the approach taken in Highland to address relational issues in our schools; and
- AGREED** the actions being taken in Highland to ensure our practice is in line with national recommendations.

11. Education Update

Cunntas às Ùr mu Fhoghlam

Transparency Statement: Mr K Gowans declared a connection to this item as an employee of UHI but, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/16/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Chair explained that the report looked at the positive progress that had been made in improving positive destinations, the planned next steps in the development of the refreshed Raising Attainment Strategy, and the ongoing progress with the restructure of the Education and Learning Service.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- parents and carers were becoming increasingly concerned that the current system by which funding for ASN provision was allocated, which was based on indicators of poverty, was causing frontline support to be withdrawn from some of the pupils who needed it most as, whilst living in poverty might have a detrimental impact on attainment, it did not have a causal link to diagnosable ASN. Parents had asked how this could be acceptable and why there had not been any consultation with the pupils, parents and carers, and it was emphasised that the provision of support should be based on need;
- the words of a pupil who was concerned about the withdrawal of their one-to-one support having been shared with the Committee, it was confirmed that the allocation of ASN resource within schools was the responsibility of Head Teachers. It was further clarified that one-to-one support was not always the best option for a young person as it could create dependency rather than encouraging independence and building confidence. Other Members suggested that one-to-one support should be withdrawn gradually in order for young people to build confidence;
- the importance of adequate ASN provision to the success of the Raising Attainment Strategy was emphasised;
- it was highlighted that positive post-school destinations could include personal development or volunteering opportunities which were not sustainable positive destinations, and that some employment destinations were not necessarily positive as demonstrated by the fact that the minimum wage for a 16-year-old was only £7.55 an hour. It was suggested that a survey be carried out to ask young people if they believed they had a positive destination six months after leaving school. In response, it was confirmed this would require working with Skills Development Scotland who currently tracked young people for six months after leaving school;
- it was queried what the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) could do to address the fact that Highland had the lowest percentage, compared to other Scottish local authorities, of school leavers continuing to further or higher education. It was suggested that a joint report or presentation with UHI be taken to a future meeting of the Committee, and the Chair confirmed this would be discussed with UHI;
- attention was drawn to the difference between achieving what was considered to be a positive destination and a young person reaching their full potential, and it was highlighted that many neurodivergent people felt that they had been unable to reach their full potential;
- it was good to see young people who had failed to achieve positive destinations being recognised and prioritised;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that the My Future My Success service was not being suspended but was changing to focus on earlier intervention as this would lead to participants achieving higher levels of success;
- it was important to keep young people in school as long as possible to build up their resilience, skills and experience, leading to the choices they made after school being more sustainable. Increasing the variety of courses and qualifications available in schools would help with this;
- work was valuable in increasing confidence and self-esteem, and the importance of establishing a strong work ethic as soon as possible after leaving education was highlighted;
- further or higher education might not be the best destination for all pupils as some young people would prefer to start earning money directly after leaving school;
- with employment opportunities coming to the Highlands through developments such as those at Kishorn, Dounreay, Vulcan and the Green Freeport, it was

important to focus on helping young people to develop the skills they would need to take advantage of these opportunities;

- the importance of widening the school curriculum and working with partners to prepare young people for a variety of different work opportunities was emphasised;
- it having been queried whether the allocation of ASN provision would be moving to a needs-based approach, it was confirmed that the current ASN staffing standard would be due for review in 2026;
- it was highlighted that the lower number of young people continuing to further or higher education was due to a larger number of young people going into work after leaving school, and that there were a variety of reasons why they would choose to do so;
- there was a close relationship between UHI and secondary schools, especially concerning pupils with ASN to ensure they were well supported in their transition from school to further or higher education; and
- it was emphasised that many young people could find positive destinations and fulfilling careers within the retail sector, and Members should be supporting the retail sector in Highland.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the content of the report and the positive progress made in improving positive destinations for all;
- ii. **NOTED** the planned next steps on the development of the refreshed Raising Attainment Strategy;
- iii. **NOTED** the ongoing progress with the restructure of the Education and Learning Service; and
- iv. **AGREED** that discussions take place with UHI regarding the possibility of a joint report or presentation to a future meeting of the Committee on what could be done to increase the number of school leavers in Highland entering into further or higher education.

12. Integrated Children's Services Board Annual Report Aithisg Bhlìadhnaìl Bòrd nan Seirbheisean Cloinne Amalaichte

Transparency Statement: Mr A Christie declared a connection to this item as a Non-Executive Director of NHS 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/17/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In introducing the report, the Chair commended the format, commenting that it was both easy to read and provided much valuable information.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members looked forward to the Vision 26 event in August, and welcomed the Integrated Children's Services Board Annual Report being brought to the Education Committee, in addition to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee, as many of the beneficial outcomes stated in the report would help put young people in the best position to make the most of their education;

- information was sought, and provided, on how care-leavers, who did not have parental financial support, would be supported;
- an update was sought, and provided, on the progress of Young Carers Statements, and it was confirmed that a further update would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee; and
- in response to a question regarding Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Strategy projects, it was confirmed that key performance indicators formed part of the commissioning arrangements and officers would be in a position to report on the outcomes of the projects.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Integrated Children's Services Board Annual Report which shared the work undertaken by the children's services planning partnership 2024/25 in delivering the Highland Integrated Children's Services Plan 2023/2026;
- ii. the work of the delivery groups; and
- iii. the work of the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme.

13. High Life Highland Progress Report Aithisg Adhartais High Life na Gàidhealtachd

Transparency Statement: Mrs M Ross declared a connection to this item as a close family member worked for High Life Highland as a music teacher but, having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest to declare.

There had been circulated Report No EDU/18/25 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland.

The Chair welcomed Steve Walsh, Chief Executive, and Norman Bolton, Head of Music Development, High Life Highland, to the meeting, and thanked the fantastic young musicians who had played prior to the commencement of the Committee and had clearly demonstrated the great work taking place within the Music Tuition service. It was a very busy period for High Life Highland, particularly with the Inverness Castle Experience and Levelling Up projects in the Northern Meeting Park and Bught Park coming into operation imminently. However, it was important the Chief Executive got out and about across the region, and it had been great to welcome him, the Council's Chief Executive and the CEO of **sportscotland** to Skye recently. The Chair then handed over to the Chief Executive, High Life Highland, to introduce the report, followed by a short video celebrating the Music Tuition service.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- surprise was expressed that there were no Gaelic implications listed in the report as music was an important route into Gaelic for many people;
- the emphasis on learning to play music together and the range of music styles offered were commended;
- information was sought, and provided, on which areas did not have music tuition available and what was being done to remedy this;
- the success of the Mod Academy and the benefits of group singing for young people were highlighted, and it was queried what was being done to provide group singing lessons;

- the financial recovery of High Life Highland following the Covid pandemic was welcomed;
- the impact of playing music on young people's confidence, mental health and character development was highlighted;
- it was pleasing to see the continued development and success of the music tuition service given the risk to the continuation of the service prior to the establishment of High Life Highland;
- congratulations were extended to the City of Inverness Youth Pipe Band who would be representing Highland in Spain, and the Skye and Lochalsh Youth Band who would be travelling to Portugal;
- it was requested that a similar report or presentation on High Life Highland be taken to a meeting of the Full Council so all Members could see the good work taking place, particularly in respect of music tuition;
- congratulations were extended to Orla MacIver on becoming the first young person to achieve a platinum hoodie for 1000 hours of volunteering. She was a great example of the value of volunteering to young people;
- in response to questions, it was confirmed that the percentage of budget High Life Highland memberships was proportionate to the number of people receiving benefits in Highland, and that there were no plans to re-open the outdoor pool at Inverness leisure at present;
- the Leisure Link scheme was commended;
- High Life Highland was one of the Council's most important partners, and the figures showing its reach and increased activity across a range of services indicated that the partnership was growing in strength; and
- Members praised the Chief Executive and his team for the work done by High Life Highland across all its service areas. Particular reference was made to the new Inverness Castle Experience, the opening of which was greatly anticipated.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the performance of High Life Highland (HLH) during the operating period to 31 March 2025, 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 Appendix B of the report; and
- iii. the information on the music tuition service in Appendix C of the report.

14. Minutes of Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee **Geàrr-chunntas Fo-Chomataidh Maoin Urras an Fhoghlaim**

There had been circulated, and were **NOTED**, draft Minutes of the Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee on 17 March 2025.

The Chair highlighted that Educational Trust Funding was supporting music tuition across the authority area, including the Youth Pipe Bands who were going abroad in the summer.

Finally, he expressed thanks to the Youth Convener, Lauren McKittrick, for all the work she had done to support the youth voice across the Highlands over the past year, and wished her well for whatever she decided to do in the future.

The meeting concluded at 1.05 pm.