

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 25 February 2026 at 9.35 am.

Present:

Mrs I Campbell (remote)	Ms M Hutchison
Mr A Christie	Ms E Knox
Mrs T Collier (substitute) (remote)	Ms L Kraft
Mr R Cross	Mr D Macpherson
Ms L Dundas	Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Ms C Ramsay
Mr R Gale	Mr K Rosie (substitute) (remote)
Mr D Gregg	Mr R Stewart

Religious Representatives (non-voting):

Rev Dr C Caley
Ms S Lamont
Mr J Maxwell

Youth Convener (non-voting):

Ms L McBain

Non-Members also present:

Mr D Fraser (remote)	Mrs M Paterson (remote)
Ms C Gillies	Mr M Prosser (remote)
Mr K Gowans	Ms M Ross
Dr M Gregson	

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People
Ms F Grant, Chief Officer – Secondary Education
Ms B Martin-Scott, Chief Officer – Primary Education and Early Years
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer – Integrated People Services
Ms C Macklin, Head of Education, Lifelong Learning and Gaelic Services
Ms A MacPherson, Strategic Lead – Resources
Mr D Martin, Strategic Lead – Operations
Mr R Campbell, Strategic Lead – Investment Strategy
Ms H Brown, Senior Manager Early Years
Ms M MacDonald, Area Quality Improvement Manager
Ms L Walker, Education Support Officer
Ms B Cairns, Principal Educational Psychologist
Ms L Harper, Headteacher, Newton Park Primary School
Ms S MacDonald, Depute Headteacher, Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh
Ms G Rodger, Chief Officer, Inspiring Young Voices (Third Sector) (remote)
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

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 Mrs S Atkin, Mrs M Cockburn, Mrs H Crawford and Mr J McGillivray.

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 Gregg

Mr D Macpherson made a general transparency statement on the basis that a close family member was a Primary School Teacher. However, having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest to declare.

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

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

Congratulations having been extended to all the schools involved for the wide variety of work and achievements that had been showcased, the Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

4. **Highland Qualifications Scotland Presentation Policy** **Poileasaidh Buileachaidh Teisteanasan Alba na Gàidhealtachd**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/1/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- young people should be challenged to achieve as much as their ambition and ability allowed, and the aspiration of the Policy was commended. However, some Members expressed concern that it was too prescriptive, while others welcomed the clear framework and consistency the Policy provided;
- it was questioned how a large urban secondary school could operate under the same conditions as a small rural school, and concern was expressed that, unless the digital offering was expanded at pace to ensure a broad curriculum for all learners, the Policy risked entrenching inequality. Other Members argued that the Policy could benefit rural schools as it would place responsibility on the Education Authority to ensure there was sufficient provision to meet the Policy requirements;

- it was necessary to consider what outcome reflected excellence, and concern was expressed that the Policy removed the ability for pupils to withdraw from courses as, in some instances, dropping a subject could enable a young person to achieve a higher grade in their remaining subjects;
- on the point being raised, Members were reassured that the Policy allowed for local flexibility at school level, and included Foundation Apprenticeships as they were a Qualifications Scotland offering;
- with reference to the proposed minimum requirements in S6, some courses were more intensive than others in terms of the amount of work required, and it was suggested there was a need for flexibility. For example, it was argued that two Highers and two Advanced Highers represented a greater workload than three Advanced Highers. In response, it was explained that each qualification had a set number of study hours, and the example of two Highers and two Advanced Highers was possible within the allocated weekly hours. However, this would be the subject of a discussion with a Guidance Teacher. It was emphasised that the Policy was aspirational, and it was necessary to trust teaching professionals to know their pupils and what was right for them;
- it was suggested the Policy be reviewed in a year's time to assess how it was working in practice, and the Chair concurred that this was a sensible approach;
- reference was made to an instance of a pupil with Additional Support Needs (ASN) being encouraged to aim low in terms of attainment. It was emphasised that this must not happen going forward, and that children should be supported and encouraged to achieve as highly as possible. Information was also sought, and provided, on the impact of the Policy on children with ASN who required additional support for exams;
- the Policy set out the minimum number of courses a pupil should take unless there were "exceptional circumstances". Information was sought, and provided, on what would be considered exceptional circumstances, and what would happen in the event of a disagreement between a pupil and/or parent and the school in that regard. Similarly, the Policy stated that there was no option to "drop" or withdraw from any subject and that courses selected at the start of an academic session would be completed by the pupil for the whole session. Further information was sought, and provided, in that regard, during which it was explained that if a pupil had spent a significant amount of the year studying a course there were other, lower-level awards, such as unit awards, that they could be presented for rather than dropping the subject completely. However, it was acknowledged there would be times when young people would need to be supported to leave a subject if it was causing them significant distress; and
- the report emphasised the Broad General Education as the vital foundation from which the Senior Phase should build. It was queried whether this breadth was being achieved in the smallest, most rural secondary schools, and the extent to which the provision of digital courses was contributing to this. In response, it was explained that, while the Council was keen to expand digital provision, there was an ongoing dispute with the teaching unions in that regard. However, there was already a significant digital offering, both from the Council and through the University of the Highlands and Islands and Edinburgh College, that was available not only to rural schools but to those in more populated areas.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Highland Qualifications Scotland Presentation Policy; and

- ii. **AGREED** that it be reviewed in a year's time to assess how it was working in practice.

5. Learning Estate Strategy Update Cunntas air Ro-innleachd na h-Oighreachd Ionnsachaidh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/2/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- there was a significant problem with school catchment areas in Inverness in that, in some areas, children did not attend their geographically closest school and, in some instances, walked past the nearest school on their way to their catchment school. Placing requests might not be an option as some school rolls were capped. This was causing dissatisfaction in the community, and it was requested that a report be brought to the next meeting of the Committee on the issues around Inverness catchment areas with a view to taking action to address the situation. It was acknowledged that a review of catchment areas would be a significant undertaking as changing a school catchment area required a statutory consultation to be carried out. However, it was considered necessary and urgent, particularly in light of the ongoing housing development taking place in parts of Inverness. The Chair recognised the concerns raised and confirmed that a report would be brought to the June meeting of the Committee articulating what action needed to be taken, adding that a phased approach might be necessary. He suggested that Members with particular issues in their wards liaise with officers so that officers fully understood what the problems were;
- Members welcomed the report and the progress that had been made, especially on the Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) schools. In relation to Broadford Primary School in particular, the investment had been badly needed, and Local Members had been pleased to see the turf cut and work progressing. However, the Council's budget papers indicated that the funding position was still to be confirmed, and an assurance was sought that the full funding package offered by the Scottish Government in 2020 had been secured and would not be affected by delays in the project. The Strategic Lead – Investment Strategy confirmed that officers were in regular dialogue with the Scottish Futures Trust, the funding agency for the Scottish Government, so they were aware of the situation. In terms of funding, an inflationary uplift had been received for both the Tain Campus and Nairn Academy projects, and it was hoped there would be a similar uplift for Broadford Primary School. He undertook to notify Members as soon as the final figure was available;
- there were still 91 schools, almost half of the school estate, rated C for condition or suitability, and the scale of the challenge could not be understated. Disappointment was expressed that LEIP phase 3 had not delivered for Highland schools, and it was necessary to take that up with the Scottish Government and press for more funding;
- it was welcomed that annual reviews were underway for currently mothballed (temporarily closed) schools. However, concern was expressed regarding reports from parents who wished to enrol their children in Edderton Primary School that they were being steered towards other schools. It was emphasised that schools were the heart of a community, and if families were directed to schools outwith their local area, mothballed schools would never reopen. A request was therefore made to actively consider how parents could be encouraged to enrol their children in their local school to get mothballed schools back into operation. In response, the

Assistant Chief Executive – People highlighted that a report on the Council’s approach to temporarily closed schools would be brought to the next meeting of Committee, which would address the points raised regarding engaging with communities about future demand for mothballed schools. It was explained that it was necessary to emphasise the temporary nature of mothballing and ensure that the Council’s website indicated that mothballed schools were available for registration, and that Members were kept up-to-date on progress. Ultimately it was a matter of parental choice. However, it was highlighted that there were challenges in terms of staffing and education provision when bringing a mothballed school back into operation;

- it was welcomed that the Beauly Primary School and Charleston Academy projects were still on track. However, recent Beauly Primary School stakeholder meetings had been cancelled or postponed, and a guarantee was sought that stakeholders, particularly parents and school staff, would receive regular updates. The Strategic Lead – Investment Strategy confirmed that it was intended to hold a stakeholder meeting before the Easter holidays, and the date would be confirmed in the next week or so;
- appreciation was expressed regarding the expansion of nursery provision across the school estate, with particular reference to the new nurseries at Duncan Forbes Primary School and Kinmylies;
- Culloden Academy had the most demountable units of all schools in Highland, and parents and teachers were disappointed at the lack of progress with plans for a new school;
- on the point being raised, the Chair confirmed that it was not the case that there would be no provision for an ASN department in the new Nairn Academy; and
- concern was expressed regarding the condition of the toilets at Invergordon Academy, particularly that there were opportunities for bullying due to the cubicle doors not reaching the floor or ceiling. It was further commented that, whilst neighbouring schools had been rebuilt, there were no imminent plans to rebuild Invergordon Academy. Reference was made to the economic growth associated with the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, and it was suggested that families seeking to move to the area for work, when looking at schools, would be unlikely to choose Invergordon and would instead go to Tain, Alness or further afield. Concern was also expressed that Park Primary School remained in temporary accommodation yet the school roll, based on the former fire-damaged buildings, still indicated that there was adequate capacity for incoming pupils. The need for an infrastructure-first approach and serious discussions about the way forward for Invergordon was emphasised. The Chair acknowledged the concerns raised and suggested that Local Members liaise with the Strategic Lead – Investment Strategy and the Estates team in that regard.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress on statutory and informal consultations as outlined in sections 5 to 7 of the report;
- ii. **NOTED** the current position and next steps for Learning Estate Investment Programme projects as outlined in section 8 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** the proposed timeline and scope for the June Learning Estate Strategy update report as outlined in section 9 of the report; and
- iv. **AGREED** that a report on the issues around Inverness school catchment areas, articulating what action needed to be taken, be brought to the June meeting of the Committee.

6. Highland Sports Strategy Update Cunntas air Ro-innleachd Spòrs na Gàidhealtachd

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

There had been circulated Report No EDU/3/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- support was expressed for the Highland Sports Strategy, the alignment of which with the Highland Investment Plan (HIP) was considered essential for improving outcomes for children, families, and communities across the Highlands. Embedding sports and community facilities within the long-term framework provided by the HIP would ensure continuity of provision across generations. The Strategy would enable the Council to set out long-term plans for delivering high-quality, affordable, accessible sport and leisure opportunities across Highland, in both rural and urban communities, with aims that would create vibrant community hubs by integrating sports, leisure, library and community services within school settings; ensure services were sustainable and planned in line with community needs and population patterns; and improve health and wellbeing and equality of access, particularly in rural areas, by co-locating services where people already had to go. Having the Strategy integrated within the HIP would bring advantages such as coordinated investment in schools and community hubs and better use of capital funding by ensuring sports and community facilities were built into HIP projects rather than added later at a higher cost. The result would be better school and community facilities, healthier children and communities, cost-effective service delivery, stronger place-based community-centred planning, and long-term sustainability for sports and leisure across the Highlands. The Strategy was an opportunity to shape a modern, integrated, community-driven model for sport and wellbeing, and to ensure every Highland community benefited. In conclusion, reference was made to work taking place in the Tain and Easter Ross ward to establish a new community sports complex. There was community backing and a recognised gap in provision, and it was suggested that the project was exactly the kind a regional strategy should prioritise. A request was made that consideration be given to embedding Tain Royal Academy Community Complex (TRACC) within the HIP, as this would give the project strategic weight, which was often essential for unlocking major capital funding. The Chair acknowledged the points raised. However, it was explained that such a decision was not a matter for the Education Committee;
- the key themes outlined in section 6 of the report were welcomed;
- an appeal was made for an increased focus on sporting provision in the more remote and rural areas of Highland;
- the sporting provision delivered by High Life Highland (HLH), and the staff who provided it, was commended. However, it was felt that more was needed;
- the strong focus on grassroots sports was welcomed. However, there was a gap in terms of support for talented young athletes and future elite players. The report briefly mentioned progression pathways, and clarification was sought as to what pathways currently existed in Highland and how the Strategy would strengthen them so young athletes did not fall through the gaps. It was also queried how the Strategy

would ensure that young people in Highland had the same access to performance development opportunities as those in more central areas of Scotland; how the review would address the barriers faced by talented athletes in rural areas, particularly around travel costs and access to performance coaching; and whether facilities would be considered in terms of supporting early performance development so that young athletes could progress without having to leave Highland. It was emphasised that sport changed lives at all levels, ages and abilities, and it was necessary to make sure that every young person had the chance to reach their full potential. The Chair concurred with the points raised, and confirmed that he was aware, through his involvement in the COSLA Sport and Physical Activity Special Interest Group and through **sportscotland**, that elite athletes were included within any programmes being developed and the funding packages provided to local authorities;

- an example having been provided of one school charging another, via HLH, to use its facilities for sporting activities, the Assistant Chief Executive – People confirmed that it was intended to review the school letting policy. Other Members added their support for such a review, commenting that, strategically, there was a need for stronger complementary work between the Council and HLH;
- the importance of disability sport, and Scotland's track record in terms of performance at the Paralympics, was emphasised, and it was requested that disability sport be specifically included in the Strategy. Other Members added that limited access to disability sport was an issue in the more remote and rural areas of Highland. The Assistant Chief Executive – People suggested that disability sport, along with the points raised regarding pathways for elite athletes, be added to the bullet points in section 8.1 of the report;
- the Rural Athletes Support Network, operating in the Ullapool area, offered travel grants and support to aspiring young athletes for whom location and transport was an issue, and it was hoped this could be emulated in other areas;
- dance was as physical, and required as much agility, balance, coordination and teamwork as many sporting activities, and it was suggested that the Strategy be broadened to include dance and other forms of movement that constituted physical exercise. This would potentially open other funding avenues and partnerships and help to address the sport dropout rate amongst teenage girls. The Chair concurred with the point raised and confirmed it could be included in the Strategy;
- sport benefited mental health as well as physical health;
- the Strategy was hugely important, but it would be challenging to achieve all the Council's aims and aspirations;
- disappointment was expressed that Culloden Academy and Leisure Centre had not been included in the report given that it was awaiting an upgrade. It was suggested that HLH Members in the Culloden area were being let down as equipment was out of operation and it was a 40-minute drive to the HLH facilities in Inverness, and it was questioned why a proper maintenance programme was not in place. In response, the Chair explained that the report was focused on strategy rather than individual facilities, and it was suggested that Local Members liaise with officers regarding the points raised;
- the Chair highlighted that young people could apply to the Council's Educational Trusts for funding to support sporting activities;
- the importance of TRACC to the Easter Ross community was emphasised. Local Members had been involved in discussions with potential stakeholders that could assist with funding, and a meeting with officers was requested as soon as possible so that matters could be progressed; and

- the valuable role of volunteers in facilitating sports provision throughout Highland was recognised.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** progress to date;
- NOTED** emerging strategic themes;
- AGREED** to progress the preparation of the Sports Strategy with the overall objectives as set out in section 8 of the report, working closely with **sportscotland** and partners through a Community, Leisure, and Sports Board, subject to the points raised regarding the inclusion of disability sport, pathways for elite athletes, and dance and other forms of movement/physical activity; and
- AGREED** that regular updates on progress be reported to the Committee, including a draft strategy for wider consultation and engagement.

7. Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – Q3 2025/26 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Buidseat Teachd-a-steach – R3 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No EDU/4/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee:-

- scrutinised and **APPROVED** the forecast financial position for Quarter 3 2025/26 as set out in the report and appendices;
- NOTED** the explanations provided for any material variances and actions taken or proposed; and
- NOTED** the update provided regarding savings delivery.

8. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report – Q3 2025/26 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Coileanadh Ràitheil – R3 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No EDU/5/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- with reference to the table at section 6.2 of the report, much of the data was incomplete due to annual updates being due at a later date, and it was queried whether target values could be added for all data points. In response, the Assistant Chief Executive – People undertook to liaise with senior officers and the performance business partner with a view to identifying more meaningful performance measures; and
- the best tool for assessing progress was school inspection reports, and it was requested that an analysis of inspection reports be brought to the next meeting of the Committee as not all Members had been receiving copies of local inspection reports and the reports gave an independent view of how the Council was delivering leadership and change; learning, teaching and assessment; equality; and wellbeing and raising attainment, which was vital information that should be analysed and discussed by the Committee. In response, it was confirmed that a report setting out the approach being taken to improving inspection outcomes would be taken to the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the performance information for the Education Service;
- ii. **NOTED** the change to Freedom of Information reporting to align with Chief Officer structure;
- iii. **NOTED** the changes to presentation of the Education Service data in sections 6-8 of the report in order to more clearly show alignment between Performance Indicators and Performance Plan commitments;
- iv. **NOTED** the inclusion of Statutory Performance Indicators outwith the Performance Plan to further support transparency and scrutiny of performance reporting; and
- v. **AGREED** that a report setting out the approach being taken to improving school inspection outcomes be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

9. Early Years Strategy Ro-innleachd nan Tràth-bhliadhnaichean

There had been circulated Report No EDU/6/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the importance of early years education, especially for the acquisition of language, was highlighted. The evidence-based approach and emphasis on the role of meaningful play, inclusive practise, emotional intelligence and sustaining and expanding key programmes, including the Words Up speech and language programme, were commended;
- information was sought, and provided, on the challenges around staff recruitment in rural areas; and on what data was being tracked and how it was collected;
- the Strategy's emphasis on strong partnership working with Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) partners was commended, and it was highlighted that collaborative working was essential to high-quality, sustainable and flexible early years provision across Highland;
- the challenges faced by PVI partners in relation to pay levels, terms and conditions and annual leave entitlement were recognised;
- some pupils were starting primary school without all the skills they would be expected to have by that stage, such as brushing their teeth and cutting their own food, and it was confirmed that these, and other developmental milestones, were being tracked in Early Learning and Childcare settings;
- there were recruitment challenges across Highland and one school in Inverness had had to reduce its wrap-around care provision due to being unable to recruit sufficient staff. When schools could not provide wrap-around care it impacted on parents' ability to work which could ultimately lead to higher levels of poverty. It was suggested that staffing levels within the Council and PVI partners be tracked to allow future challenges to be predicted, and that the provision of supply staff be supported;
- the importance of early intervention was emphasised, as better results could be achieved by targeting potential issues in the early years rather than waiting until later in school when these issues were more difficult to address;

- in response to a question, it was confirmed that pupils from the ASN Nursery at Cauldean Primary School were continuing on to primary education at Drummond School, and it was clarified that, due to the legal presumption of mainstreaming, local authorities were expected to support children with ASN to attend their local school, especially if that is what their parents would prefer; and
- it was queried why the suggestions and views of parents and teachers were not afforded the same weight as the recommendations of HM Inspectors of Education.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **APPROVED** the Early Years Strategy (Appendix 2 of the report);
- ii. **NOTED** the three high-level strategic priorities for the period of the Strategy; and
- iii. **NOTED** the next steps.

10. **ACEL (Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels) Attainment Update** **Cunntas Buileachaidh a thaobh Coileanadh Ìrean a' Churraicealaim airson Sàr- mhathais**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/7/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In addition to the report, Laura Harper, Headteacher, Newton Park Primary School, and Shona MacDonald, Depute Headteacher, Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh, gave a presentation on how school ethos, community involvement and prioritising well-being helped to drive attainment.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the success of targeted support for small groups of pupils to improve attainment was recognised, as well as the importance of support for self-evaluation, a pupil-centred approach, community within and outwith school, play and additional activities such as music;
- the astute use of data to help improve attainment was commended;
- concern was expressed that improvements in attainment in earlier stages were not continuing past S3. It was suggested that recruitment challenges, staffing instability, staff absences, a shortage of robust school improvement plans and lack of consistency in tracking and monitoring systems could be contributing to this, and that wider strategic action needed to be taken;
- the introduction of the Family Link Worker in Newton Park Primary School was welcomed, and it was suggested that a lot could be learned from the success of this approach;
- the steady increase in attainment over the past five years was very encouraging but results were still not in line with national levels and it was important to remain aware of this and continue working towards targets;
- the methods of assessment and observation used to track the progress of early years pupils were commended, and it was suggested that it would be useful to include early years data, similar to that which had been included in the Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh presentation, in future Early Years Strategy reports;
- an explanation of stretch aims, and whether some needed to be revised in light of the results in 2024/25, was sought, and provided;

- it was requested that a report showing data on how pupils' achievement progressed through primary and secondary school be brought to a future meeting of the Committee;
- it was queried whether the statistics highlighted any areas of concern or any areas where more resources were needed, especially around the transition period between P4 and P6/7;
- while improvement was welcome, it was not progressing quickly enough and it was suggested that the data showed a lack of strength and ambition within education which was troubling as, for many, education was a route out of poverty. Although there had been some recovery since 2021, this did not equate to excellence, transformation or equity, and primary attainment had stalled, with the Council failing to meet its own standards in terms of tackling inequality and closing the attainment gap between the most deprived and least deprived pupils, which was even larger by the time pupils reached S3;
- the growth of Gaelic Medium Education was welcomed, and information was sought, and provided, on the recruitment challenges within Gaelic Medium Education, and the reporting of Gaelic Medium attainment figures;
- the presentations provided a valuable insight into the steps being taken within schools to raise attainment. The different approaches taken by each school emphasised the importance of not being overly prescriptive and allowing teachers and headteachers to decide what worked best for their school;
- it was queried why 2021 had been chosen as a benchmark as some attainment figures were lower or unavailable due to the Covid 19 pandemic; and
- the breakdown of literacy figures into the three areas of listening and talking, reading, and writing was welcomed. It was suggested that, in future, it would be useful to see a breakdown of the rates of change in each of those areas, and it was queried whether children who were not meeting the literacy requirements were not meeting all or only one or two of the three areas. In response, it was clarified that the data reflected pupils who had achieved all three of the requirements and that writing was the most difficult element to achieve which was why a high number of schools were engaging with the National Improving Writing Programme.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the Council's commitment to improving attainment and achievement at all stages through strategic initiatives developed in collaboration with school staff detailed in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. the content of the report, the positive outcomes for young people and the focus on improving further.

11. Gaelic Education Foghlam Gàidhlig

There had been circulated Report No EDU/8/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in some areas the number of pupils in Gaelic Medium Education was higher than those in English Medium Education;

- information was sought, and provided, on the reasons why Gaelic Medium Education was most popular in the early years and declined as pupils move through school; and challenges in teacher recruitment;
- it was important that reports on Gaelic education came to the Education Committee as the Education Service covered the education of all children in Highland. Members were encouraged to stay for further discussion of Gaelic education in the Gaelic Committee;
- it was emphasised that there was more to education than academics, as had been shown in the previous presentation from the Head Teacher of Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh, and the increasing number of opportunities for young Gaelic speakers was highlighted; and
- on the point being raised; it was explained that Gaelic speaking pupils could be targeted in High School and encouraged to work in Gaelic Medium Early Learning and Childcare Settings where they could work while earning a Scottish Vocational Qualification.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the commitment to Gaelic specific Career Long Professional Learning focused workstreams alongside partnership working with Education Scotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and other national bodies to strengthen professional learning pathways, develop high-quality learning resources, and align work with national Gaelic education priorities;
- ii. the positive impact of recent school improvement, attainment and achievement focused actions to encourage continued monitoring and evaluation of Gaelic initiatives in schools and their impact and effectiveness; and
- iii. the Scottish Government Gaelic Capital awards and their contribution to improving Gaelic curriculum outcomes for pupils.

12. Delivery Plan Update: Person Centred Solutions Board - Early Learning and Childcare Project

Cunntas air a' Phlana Libhrigidh: Bòrd Fuasglaidhean Stèidhichte air an Neach – Pròiseact Tràth-ionnsachaidh is Cùraim-chloinne

There had been circulated Report No EDU/9/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- in response to a query as to how the anticipated savings of £0.5m would be achieved, it was explained that some savings had been identified through the Education Service restructuring process and these and other savings would be reported in the next quarterly update;
- on the point being raised, reassurance was provided that, since the report had been written, significant progress had been made in respect of the two delayed milestones, and it was anticipated they would be completed by the end of the project;
- in response to questions as to how many rural settings were at risk, it was clarified that alternative delivery models were being proposed for rural and island communities where the current provision was not sustainable or was not meeting the needs of the community; and
- there were many challenges around the provision of Early Learning and Childcare in rural areas and, because lack of childcare was a key driver of depopulation,

overcoming these challenges was extremely important. The development of a Single Care Model was welcomed, and the importance of supporting childminding was emphasised as increasing the availability of childminders would make a significant difference, particularly in rural areas.

The Committee scrutinised and **NOTED** the report, including progress to date and next steps.

13. Promoting and Realising Children's Rights A' Brosnachadh is a' Buileachadh Chòraichean Chloinne

There had been circulated Report No EDU/10/27 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- although the intentions stated in the report were admirable, attention was drawn to the data which showed that significant numbers of pupils did not feel safe, respected or that they were achieving. The report did not expand on the possible reasons for this, such as bullying, behaviour and exclusion policies, staffing pressures, and trauma support capacity. It was queried whether targets were being set to tackle these issues as, to properly support children's rights, more focused strategies would be needed. In response, it was clarified that the data provided from the Lifestyle Survey concerning whether children felt safe included community safety and safety at home as well as at school, and that, although data about the causes and effects of bullying had been tracked for a number of years, the purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the Council's reporting requirements under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Implementation Act, so this had not been included; and
- it was highlighted that Ullapool High School had received the silver Rights Aware Award, and it was always encouraging to see what schools were doing to promote children's rights.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the requirements of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act (2024) and how it impacted on the work of Elected Members;
- AGREED** to continue to consider children's rights in all decisions made by the Education Committee; and
- NOTED** some of the work ongoing to ensure children's rights were recognised and realised across Highland.

14. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

The Committee **NOTED** the following draft Minutes:-

- Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (Annual General Meeting) – 2 December 2025; and
- Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (Ordinary Meeting) – 2 December 2025.

15. Membership of Sub-Committees
Ballrachd air Fo-Chomataidhean

The Committee **AGREED** that Mr R Cross be appointed to the Highland Alliance Group vacancies on the Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee and the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers.

16. Appointment to Highland Football Academy Trust
Cur an Dreuchd gu Urras Acadamaidh Ball-coise na Gàidhealtachd

- * The Committee **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that Ms K MacLean be appointed to replace Ms H Hutchison on the Highland Football Academy Trust.

The meeting concluded at 12.40 pm.