

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Education Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Wednesday 3 June 2026 at 9.35 am.

Present:

Mrs S Atkin	Ms C Gillies (substitute)
Mrs I Campbell (remote)	Mr J Grafton (substitute)
Mr A Christie	Ms M Hutchison
Mrs M Cockburn	Ms E Knox
Mrs H Crawford	Ms L Kraft
Mr R Cross	Mr D Macpherson (remote)
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)	Mr D Millar (Vice Chair)
Mr D Fraser	Ms C Ramsay
Mr R Gale	Mr R Stewart

Religious Representatives (non-voting):

Ms S Lamont
Mr J Maxwell

Youth Convener (non-voting):

Ms L McBain

Non-Members also present:

Dr M Gregson (remote)	Mrs T Robertson (remote)
Mr G MacKenzie (remote)	Mrs M Ross (remote)
Mrs M Paterson (remote)	

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive – People
Ms F Grant, Chief Officer – Secondary Education
Ms F Malcolm, Chief Officer – Integrated People Services
Ms B Martin-Scott, Chief Officer – Primary Education and Early Years
Ms C Macklin, Head of Education
Mr R Campbell, Strategic Lead – Investment Strategy and Planning (remote)
Ms A MacPherson, Strategic Lead – Resources
Mr D Martin, Strategic Lead – Operations
Ms G Winter, Head Teacher, Newmore Primary School
Ms S Kevill, Project Manager (Whole Family Wellbeing)
Ms A Anthoney, Senior Youth Development Officer
Ms G Rodger, Chief Officer, Inspiring Young Voices (Third Sector) (remote)
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer
Ms R Ross, Committee Officer

Also in attendance:

Mr A Standing, Head of Operations – North, Skills Development Scotland
Mr S Walsh, Chief Executive, High Life Highland
Ms J Corcoran, Head of Libraries and Archives, 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 Mr D Gregg and Mr K Rosie.

2. **Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statement** **Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt/ Aithris Fhollaiseachd**

The Committee **NOTED** the following:-

Mr R Cross made a general Transparency Statement on the basis that a close family member was on the supply bank for nurseries as an Early Years Practitioner and was a Youth Support Officer at a youth club. 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, the Committee **NOTED** the outstanding achievements.

4. **Statutory Consultation: Request to proceed to consultation on the relocation of Thurso High, Pennyland Primary and Miller Academy Primary Schools to a new setting serving all three schools** **Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Iarrrtas a dhol air adhart gu co-chomhairleachadh a thaobh a bhith a' gluasad Àrd-Sgoil Inbhir Theòrsa, Bun-Sgoil Pennyland agus Bun-Sgoil Acadamaidh Mhìc a' Mhuilleir gu àite ùr a bhios a' frithealadh nan trì sgoiltean**

There had been circulated Report No EDU/11/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Assistant Chief Executive – People highlighted that a correction was required to the covering report and the proposal paper at Appendix 2 as both documents referred to Mount Pleasant Primary School having a standalone Croileagan which would be required to close. In fact, the Croileagan no longer existed, and the reference to it would be removed from the proposal paper before it was published for public consultation.

The Committee **AGREED** to proceed to statutory consultation based on the proposal attached to the report at Appendix 2, subject to removal of the reference to Mount Pleasant Primary School having a standalone Croileagan.

5. Statutory Consultation: Relocation of Beauly Primary School – Final Report Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Gluasad Bun-Sgoil na Manachainn gu àite ùr – Aithisg Dheireannach

There had been circulated Report No EDU/12/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, Local Members spoke to the background to the proposal to relocate Beauly Primary School and expressed thanks to the Parent Council and local stakeholders for their efforts in helping to identify a new site for the school.

It was commented by one Local Member that expectations had been raised previously and progress had repeatedly stalled, and it was highlighted that there was significant scepticism within the community as to whether the new school would be delivered by 2028 as stated. In order to demonstrate how it was intended to progress from the current position to a new school in 2028, a number of questions were raised including the status of negotiations with the landowner and whether a purchase price had been agreed in principle; whether a concluded contract was in place, subject to planning permission, or if heads of terms been agreed; the level of confidence officers had that the land transaction would be completed in sufficient time to allow the school to open in 2028; in the event that the new site did not proceed for any reason, what contingency plans were in place – eg would the Council revert to the playing fields site, and what impact would that have on the 2028 target date; if a purchase price had been agreed, was the project still on budget; and, for the purposes of transparency and to instil confidence that the new school would be operational in 2028, could officers provide a clear delivery programme, covering key stages from conveyancing and planning consent to procurement, construction and handover, and share it with parents and teachers.

It was intended to move an amendment reflecting the questions raised, which had also been asked at previous meetings of the stakeholder group but remained unanswered. However, the Chair emphasised that the report related solely to the outcome of the statutory consultation and the decision to relocate Beauly Primary School from its current site, and he undertook to liaise with Estates officers to ensure that the questions would be addressed at the forthcoming stakeholder meeting. In addition, as the matters raised fell within the remit of the Housing and Property Committee, the Vice Chair of the Housing and Property Committee undertook to take them forward.

The Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** the progress being made in relation to the Highland Investment Plan and the development of a Community Point of Delivery in Beauly;
- ii. **NOTED** the outcome of the statutory consultation on the proposal to relocate Beauly Primary School;
- iii. **NOTED** the report from Education Scotland at Appendix 4 of the report, and the educational benefits identified;
- * iv. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that Beauly Primary School be relocated from its current site to a new site west of Cnoc na Ràth, Beauly, as part of a new Community Point of Delivery; and
- v. **AGREED**, subject to iv. above, that officers should fully address and discharge the recommendations and matters raised by Education Scotland as set out in the Consultation Report at Appendix 2 of the report.

6. Statutory Consultation: Request to proceed to consultation on the relocation of Plockton Primary School

Co-chomhairleachadh Reachdail: Iarrtas a dhol air adhart gu co-chomhairleachadh reachdail a thaobh a bhith a' gluasad Bun-Sgoil a' Phluic gu àite ùr

There had been circulated Report No EDU/13/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

Local Members welcomed the report being brought forward, adding that the local community looked forward to participating in the consultation process and the associated public meeting. It was highlighted that one of the questions likely to be raised was what would happen to the building that was being vacated, and the Chair confirmed that this matter would be addressed by officers.

The Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** that the Council proceed to a statutory consultation, in terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, on the proposal to permanently relocate Plockton Primary School to the Plockton High School campus;
- ii. **AGREED** that the Council use the opportunity to engage on an informal basis about the future location of Plockton Nursery Early Learning and Childcare to the High School campus; and
- iii. **NOTED** that a further report would be brought back to Committee following the conclusion of the statutory consultation.

7. Temporary School Closures – Statutory Guidance, Governance and Adoption of Policy

Dùnaidhean Sealach Sgoiltean – Stiùireadh Reachdail, Riaghlachas agus Gabhail ri Poileasaidh

There had been circulated Report No EDU/14/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- schools in remote and rural areas were at the heart of communities, providing confidence for new families to move into the area, and a school closure weakened the whole community. The Scottish Government guidance made it clear that temporary closures should not be used to circumvent the statutory consultation requirements for permanent school closures, and that consideration must be given to issues such as depopulation, sustainability, future housing, employment opportunities and the long-term attractiveness of an area. It was suggested that the draft policy did not place these considerations at the centre of decision-making, there being no mandatory rural sustainability or depopulation assessment, no clear test in relation to future housing or population growth, no published reporting of re-opening criteria, no requirement to retain enrolment forms, and no duty to publish expressions of interest from families. There was a risk of temporary closures becoming permanent due to families moving away and there then being no demand to re-open the school, and it was emphasised that every reasonable alternative should be exhausted before any decision was taken to close a school.

It was suggested that the matter be deferred to allow for a Members' workshop, and that a revised policy be brought back incorporating appropriate safeguards in relation to depopulation and sustainability, together with transparency around the criteria for re-opening schools. In response, the Chair drew attention to the Engagement and Communication section of the policy which indicated that there would be extensive engagement with children and young people, parents, staff and community representatives prior to any decision being taken. In terms of the request for a workshop, whilst a Members' workshop was planned in respect of school catchment areas in Inverness, it was not intended to hold a workshop in relation to this item. The Assistant Chief Executive – People highlighted the Evidence Base section of the policy, explaining that all of the information listed therein would be presented to the Committee every time a proposal for a temporary closure was brought forward, together with an Integrated Impact Assessment covering equalities, poverty and human rights, children's rights and wellbeing, climate change, island and mainland rural communities, and data protection. Other than in emergency circumstances, all Members would have the opportunity to engage fully with every proposed temporary closure, and all relevant information would be published on the Council's website. It was emphasised that decision-making rested with Elected Members, not officers, and it was confirmed that re-opening criteria would be brought forward;

- Members welcomed the replacement of the term “mothballing”, which had led to a lot of misunderstanding within communities;
- the clarity and quality of the updated statutory guidance was welcomed, particularly the emphasis on the importance of community engagement and consultation, even where formal statutory consultation was not triggered;
- as set out in the recommendations, planned temporary school closures would be brought to the Committee for approval prior to implementation. Accordingly, Members had a responsibility to give due consideration to the concerns raised earlier in the discussion;
- attention was drawn to point 71 in Appendix 3 of the report, which recommended that local authorities consider alignment to the 2024 Addressing Depopulation Action Plan and encompass within any decision-making process active consideration of broader rural development and demographic outcomes, recognising the key role of schools and nurseries in creating attractive places for households to locate themselves;
- whilst the draft policy made it clear that it applied to both schools and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings, the report and recommendations made no specific reference to ELC settings, and the importance of considering ELC settings in their own right was emphasised. The Chair proposed that recommendation ii. be amended to “approve the Highland Council Temporary School and ELC Settings Closures Policy, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report”;
- the Council's default position should be a presumption against the closure of rural schools;
- with reference to the temporary closure of Edderton Primary School, concern was expressed regarding reports of parents asking to place their children at the school only to be told it was closed, and that the community was not being provided with sufficient information on the current status of the school. Particular reference was made to assets being removed from the school which could lead people to think that it was closing permanently if an explanation was not provided. The importance of engaging with communities and providing regular updates, on a monthly basis if necessary, when a school was temporarily closed was emphasised. The Assistant Chief Executive – People concurred regarding the

importance of community engagement and communication, explaining that the intention of the policy was that this would become standard practice. Whilst monthly updates might not be feasible given the size of the school estate, it was important that stakeholders were kept informed whenever there was a change, and it would be helpful to receive input from Local Members to ensure that all relevant stakeholders were included. The Chair added that there was a need for consistency so that the level of engagement taking place in some instances was applied across the authority area;

- reference was made to instances of schools being temporarily closed for an extended period, and it was hoped that the new policy would lead to quicker resolution of issues and a less reactive approach;
- children had a right to an education, and that should be at the centre of decision-making; and
- social interaction was an important aspect of a child's education.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the updated statutory guidance relating to temporary school closures and the distinction between temporary and permanent school closures;
- APPROVED** the Highland Council Temporary School and ELC Settings Closures Policy, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report;
- AGREED** that planned temporary school closures be brought to the Education Committee for approval prior to implementation; and
- AGREED** that unplanned or immediate temporary school closures be reported to the Education Committee as soon as practicable after a decision is taken.

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

There had been circulated Report No EDU/15/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- it was queried whether Lochaber as whole could benefit from a similar approach to that being taken in Inverness in terms of catchment reviews, as a number of schools in the area were operating at 20-30% occupancy and were rated C for overall condition;
- thanks were expressed for the work taken forward in relation to Inverness catchment areas, and the proposed workshop in that regard was welcomed. It was highlighted that there were areas within Inverness, such as the Crown area, where four or five primary school catchment areas converged, resulting in situations where children did not attend their nearest school, and it was necessary to review the position and introduce more sensible boundaries. Many catchment boundaries were historic and encompassed areas that had previously been green fields but had since been developed for housing. It was difficult to explain to parents why their children could not attend their nearest school, and it was necessary to address the situation as it did not reflect well on the Council. It was also essential that the Masterplan Consent Areas for both Ardersier and Essich Road were taken into account. In relation to Essich Road in particular, should the proposed development of 300 houses proceed, the designated catchment school would require a new wing, whereas the closest school had capacity. The review

presented an opportunity to address the concerns of families and to achieve a more balanced distribution across the school estate in terms of occupancy, and it was emphasised that the matter should be progressed without delay as it would be a complex and lengthy task. On the point being raised, the Chair reaffirmed the commitment in the report that a workshop would be held in advance of the July recess and that an update would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee;

- the Learning Estate Strategy Guiding Principles indicated that the condition and suitability of learning environments should support and enhance their function. However, of the 195 schools listed in Appendix 2 of the report, 41 schools were rated C for both condition and suitability. Whilst 10 of those schools were in the process of being replaced, that left 31 schools in which it appeared that little substantive progress was being made in terms of improvement works. Whilst the scale of the challenge, the historic causes and the funding constraints were understood, concern was expressed that some pupils were attending schools that were wholly inadequate, and it was queried what was being done to support those pupils. In particular, unsuitable toilet facilities could give rise to bullying which had a detrimental impact on pupils' mental health. The need for action to address these issues was emphasised, and a challenge was extended to the Administration to bring forward a proposal in that regard. In responding to the points raised, the Strategic Lead – Investment Strategy and Planning explained that other capital fundings streams, comprising approximately £5m per annum for schools and £9-10m for all Council buildings and assets, were available to address more immediate issues in schools that were not currently part of the Highland Investment Plan (HIP), and officers would be liaising with all Ward Members regarding planned investment in their local schools;
- information was sought, and provided, on the timescale, from commissioning design work to occupation, for the delivery of a new school, and for the new Tain campus in particular;
- concern was expressed that, of the secondary school and two primary schools in Invergordon, five out of six condition and suitability ratings were category C, and there was no programme in place for the replacement of Park Primary School, which had closed following a fire in 2020. In response to concerns regarding the timescale for works to upgrade the toilet facilities at Invergordon Academy, it was explained that this was an extensive project which could not be completed within the summer holiday period, and it was confirmed that officers would provide an update to Ward Members in due course;
- reference was made to instances of schools in close proximity operating at less than 50% occupancy where one of the schools was in considerably better condition. It was requested that, as part of any review, consideration be given to co-location in such circumstances, given the potential benefits in terms of educational outcomes and rationalisation of the school estate. Following consultation with the Chair, the Assistant Chief Executive – People proposed an addition to the Learning Estate Strategy Guiding Principles regarding looking at the wider estate and where co-location made sense. It was emphasised that this would require to be part of the place-based approach and would be subject to formal processes and without presumption. The Chair suggested that proposed wording be circulated to Members of the Committee;
- whilst the concerns regarding the condition of the school estate were acknowledged, it was highlighted that, prior to the HIP, there had been no plan in place;
- the results achieved by Head Teachers and school staff, despite operating in less than suitable school facilities, were commended;

- it was highlighted that housing development did not necessarily result in increasing school rolls, as illustrated by the example of the Black Isle Ward, and the complexities associated with the Highland Housing Challenge, population decline and school roll forecasting were recognised;
- all Members, not only those representing remote and rural areas, had a responsibility to consider the rationalisation of schools in light of the figures in Appendix 2 of the report;
- further to earlier comments regarding the number of category C schools, the need to implement a programme of maintenance to bring the schools not scheduled for replacement up to a reasonable standard was emphasised. Particular reference was made to Golspie High School and Golspie Primary School, both of which had leaking roofs that had resulted in damage to flooring and classrooms being rendered unusable;
- the significant amount of work undertaken to assess and evidence the condition and suitability of every school in Highland was recognised. Improvements had begun to be seen, and it was suggested that consideration should be given not only to the current ratings but to the target ratings, how that would be achieved, and how this could be supported;
- the importance of adequate provision of gathering spaces, such as assembly halls, and canteen facilities was emphasised, and information was sought, and provided, on what provision had been made for such spaces in new build schools;
- whilst the new Tain campus being fully operational was welcomed, it was highlighted that there were now four vacant education sites in the town and that instances of vandalism had occurred. It was understood that demolition plans were in place for two of the sites. However, concern was expressed that, unless plans were brought forward quickly for the remaining two sites, further issues could arise, and assurance was sought, and provided, that work was being progressed on this matter;
- Members acknowledged the contribution of Finlay MacDonald, Chief Officer – Property and Assets, who had recently retired, to the Council's estates work over many years;
- the work on Inverness High School as part of the HIP was welcomed, and it was hoped that Crown Primary School would be able to celebrate its 150th anniversary with repairs having been completed;
- the Guiding Principle relating to outdoor learning was welcomed, and would be important to bear in mind as work progressed on constructing Community Points of Delivery; and
- lack of green space was an issue, several schools having no green space at all, and it was confirmed that this matter was being taken seriously going forward.

The Committee:-

- i. **APPROVED** the updated Learning Estate Strategy included in Appendix 1 of the report, subject to the proposed addition to the Guiding Principles regarding co-location, the wording of which to be circulated to Members of the Committee;
- ii. **NOTED** the Core School Facts Summary included in Appendix 2 of the report; and
- iii. **AGREED** to a Member and officer workshop to consider school catchments in the Inverness area with the aim of bringing an update on progress and next steps to the next meeting of the Education Committee.

9. Improving School Inspection Outcomes A' Leasachadh Bhuilean Sgrùdaidhean Sgoile

There had been circulated Report No EDU/16/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In addition to the report, the Head Teacher of Newmore Primary School gave a presentation on the recent inspection of the school, detailing the inspection process, the inspection findings, the support received from the area quality improvement team in the lead up to, and during, the inspection, and how it was intended to address any areas identified for improvement.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- Members welcomed the report and congratulated all those involved in the inspection of Newmore Primary School on the excellent outcome, adding that it was necessary to ensure that all schools were routinely achieving such inspection results;
- it was suggested that every school inspection report should be analysed, and that consideration should be given to how the learning could be applied to other schools;
- the sample report to Area Committees at Appendix 1 of the report indicated that the themes of the inspection report would be summarised and that there would be a link to the summarised inspection findings on the Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) website. The need for greater transparency and openness was emphasised, and it was suggested that the full inspection report should be appended to the report. The Chair confirmed that the inspection report and the summarised inspection findings could be appended to the Area Committee report;
- it was suggested that, following a school inspection, the inspection report should be published on the homepage on the school's website. The Chair confirmed that this was already taking place, but advised that it could be followed up to ensure it was happening in every case;
- it having been suggested that a Parent Council meeting should be convened promptly after the publication of a school inspection report, the Chair concurred that Parent Council engagement was key, and explained that, aside from the Council, the relevant Parent Council Chair was the first person to receive the inspection report and should take it forward for discussion by the Parent Council;
- it was suggested that, where a school inspection report was less than satisfactory, it should be reported not only to the relevant Area Committee but to the Education Committee, in the interests of transparency and awareness;
- with reference to the table at section 8.1 of the report, Members queried the figures in respect of special schools, and whether it was necessary to change the assessment process or the values of assessment for Additional Support Needs (ASN) or special school pupils;
- in response to a question regarding the 64% of pupils at Newmore Primary School with ASN, it was confirmed that, while this presented challenges, an appropriate level of support was in place to meet the range of needs and abilities that existed. The Chair added that it was important to recognise that there was a no single definition of ASN, and that the type and duration of support required varied;
- given that Newmore Primary School had been under threat of closure in the 1980s, it was welcomed that it was now thriving, and the role of small rural schools in supporting children was emphasised. It was added that, had the school closed,

- pupils would have attended either Park Primary School or South Lodge Primary School, which would have placed significant additional pressure on those schools;
- further to discussions under item 8, it was highlighted that Newmore Primary School was rated C for both condition and suitability, which made the inspection results even more impressive;
 - there was a misconception that schools in areas with higher levels of deprivation were of a lower standard, and it was welcomed that the report indicated that, although contexts differed, there was a high level of consistency in the areas identified for improvement;
 - information was sought, and provided, on how the new model for delivering improvement supported Head Teachers, particularly Acting Head Teachers or those who were new in post;
 - it was suggested that there was a risk that the core focus on learning and teaching might be diminished due to the wide-ranging expectations placed upon Primary Head Teachers;
 - the stress associated with school inspections was recognised and, in response to a question, the Head Teacher of Newmore Primary School spoke to her positive experience of the inspection process and the support provided both by the Area Quality Improvement Manager and the inspection team; and
 - it was positive that support staff within Newmore Primary School undertook multiple roles, and information was sought, and provided, on how challenging it had been to implement this approach and the benefits arising from multi-tasking roles.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the contents of the report; and
- APPROVED** the plan for reporting to Area Committees shown in Appendix 1 of the report, subject to the inspection report and the summarised inspection findings being appended to the report; and
- AGREED** that it be ensured that, following a school inspection, the inspection report was published on the homepage of the school's website.

10. Delivery Plan Monitoring & Progress Update – My Highland Future Q4 2025/26 Sgrùdadh & Cunntas air Adhartas a' Phlana Lìbhrigidh – Àm Ri Teachd Mo Ghàidhealtachd R4 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No EDU/17/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In addition to the report, the Head of Operations – North, Skills Development Scotland gave a presentation on Workforce North and how it aligned in with My Highland Future and work already being carried out within the Council. In particular, information was provided on the place-based workforce strategy, the work underway to grow apprenticeships, the wider partnership working taking place, and the Employer Board.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the vast majority of Highland students who went on to university did not attend the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) but rather left Highland to go to university in the Central Belt or Aberdeen, often staying there after graduation. It was queried whether greater partnership work between universities, for example,

allowing students to gain an accredited degree from a Central Belt university while studying at a UHI campus, would encourage more young people to stay in Highland and help tackle the problem of depopulation, which led to there not being enough people to fill jobs in Highland. In response, information was provided on efforts to encourage young people to remain in or return to Highland, including the summer placement programme, accelerated degree pathways, the use of aspiration data from S2 and S3 pupils, and sector specific skills events in partnership the UHI;

- information was sought, and provided, on what had been gained from the skills intelligence work being carried out by Workforce Highland; the Workforce Response Team; and the skills shortages that had been identified in rural areas and what was being done to address these;
- the employer roadshow around the North Coast 500 was welcomed; the importance of working to meet employment needs across Highland, rather than focusing on Inverness, was emphasised; and, in response to a question, it was confirmed that the Employer Board included representation from all areas of Highland and many different industries;
- it was queried whether Workforce North was working with SSE to expand the provision of SSE apprenticeships throughout Highland;
- the Workforce Response Team pilot scheme in Easter Ross was welcomed; the importance of early intervention for disengaged young people was emphasised; and, in response to a query, it was confirmed that the Workforce Response Team was already working with For You Training who ran the Grow for You project;
- in response to a question, it was clarified that some of the Key Milestones and Requests for Change had been RAG-rated Green but not marked as completed because the activity had been successfully implemented and was ongoing;
- information was sought, and provided, on several points relating to the Digital School. In particular, it was confirmed that the £1.3m of efficiency savings relating to Devolved School Management Adjustments and Digital Learning had been met, and it was confirmed that £64,000 of the original investment had been spent to pay staff who taught one day per week in the Digital School and the rest remained within restricted reserves for the running of the Digital School; and
- it was suggested that it would be better to second staff to work on short-term projects such as the School-Based Interventions project rather than employing temporary staff who might move on to other employment before the end of the project. However, it was explained that secondment would not have helped in that case as it would have created the need to employ someone on a short-term contract in a different role.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the Delivery Project updates provided in the report; and
- ii. **NOTED** the extensive activity and progress to date across all workstreams and headings.

11. High Life Highland Progress Update Cunntas air Adhartas High Life na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No EDU/18/26 by the Chief Executive, High Life Highland.

In addition to the report, Julie Corcoran, Head of Libraries and Archives, High Life Highland, gave a presentation on the services provided by libraries, highlighting customer engagement, support for schools and learning, and the impact of libraries on communities.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- High Life Highland was commended for its great work across the whole of Highland, particularly its Library Service;
- the proactive, innovative and enterprising work of Fortrose Library was highlighted, and thanks were extended to the librarian;
- in response to a query regarding Summer of Sport funding, it was confirmed that the funding opportunities would be publicised over the coming weeks, and Members were asked to encourage community sports groups to apply for funding;
- the high quality and wide-ranging work carried out by Countryside Rangers, particularly in Sutherland, was highlighted;
- in response to a request for an update on the mobile library service, it was explained that new vehicles had been on order for some time, and the Council's Fleet Management Team had been working to ensure that they would be ready as soon as possible while also being fit for purpose. It was hoped that these vehicles would be operational soon and, in the meantime, a "click and collect" service using small vans was being provided to the three areas that did not currently have a mobile library;
- the summary of how High Life Highland services promoted Gaelic language and culture was welcomed, and the success of the Gaelic-speaking shinty session at Bught Park, which demonstrated the importance of using Gaelic in everyday life and not only in school, was commended;
- the importance of getting as many young people as possible participating in sport throughout Highland was emphasised;
- in response to a request, the Chief Executive, High Life Highland confirmed that an update on High Life Highland activity in the Skye and Raasay Ward could be provided at the Ward Business Meeting; and
- information was sought, and provided, on the engagement of young people with the Library Service, through both school and public libraries;

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the contributions made by High Life Highland to the Highland Council's Corporate Plan in Appendix A of the report;
- ii. the information on the annual performance indicators;
- iii. the information on the externally funded summer of sport programme;
- iv. the general updates provided in Appendix B of the report; and
- v. the information on the libraries service in Appendix C of the report.

12. Highland Sport Strategy Update Cunntas air Ro-innleachd Spòrs na Gàidhealtachd

There had been circulated Report No EDU/19/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- the Strategy was welcomed and the need for it was emphasised, but it was suggested that it may have come too late given the pressures already being faced by facilities and communities. Particular attention was drawn to the Tain Royal Academy Community Complex (TRACC) which was due to lose its swimming pool, and the implications of this for the local community were highlighted. However, the five-year reprieve was welcomed, and the work of the local TRACC Steering Group towards building a new facility was recognised;
- some of the challenges, including the loss of girls from sport around the age of 13, transport barriers, buildings not being up to standard, and increased running costs, were already known, and it was emphasised that the focus should be on investigating the underlying causes of these issues and identifying possible solutions, rather than gathering the same information again;
- the importance of all types of physical activity and exercise was highlighted, and it was suggested that including other forms of activity, such as dance, could help address the issue of girls leaving sport in their teenage years. In response to a query, it was confirmed that consideration would be given to a broader and more holistic title for the Strategy to better reflect this;
- the importance of having a strategy for the whole of highland, to ensure that opportunities and amenities were evenly distributed, was emphasised; and
- the need to include active travel within the Strategy was highlighted.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the commissioning of Hub North and Mott MacDonald to develop a Highland Sport Strategy proposal;
- NOTED** the commission brief at Appendix 1 of the report and the programme timeline at Appendix 2 of the report; and
- AGREED** that consideration be given to a broader and more holistic title for the Strategy.

13. Presentation: Youth Convener Update **Taisbeanadh: Cunntas air Neach-gairm na h-Òigridh**

Highland Youth Convener, Leah McBain, gave a presentation on her term as Youth Convener, highlighting the work of the Highland Youth Parliament, the Youth Convener Roadshow, her focus on online safety and technology, and the importance of youth work and partnership working.

During discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- congratulations were extended to the Youth Convener on a successful term and thanks were expressed for her hard work and the work of everyone who had supported her;
- it was highlighted that a new Youth Convener would be appointed imminently, and it was hoped that Leah would pass on the knowledge she had gained; and
- the work undertaken on technology and online safety was commended, and its importance in the lives of young people was emphasised.

The Committee otherwise **NOTED** the presentation.

14. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report – Q4 2025/26
Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Coileanadh Ràitheil – R4 2025/26

There had been circulated Report No EDU/20/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

Concern was expressed regarding the late payment of invoices, which did not reflect well on the Council and could create cash flow difficulties for small local businesses. It was highlighted that, when members of the public failed to pay bills to the Council on time, swift action was taken, and it was suggested that the Council should hold itself to the same standard. It was hoped that improvements could be made prior to the next performance report. In response, the Assistant Chief Executive – People explained that, whilst the target for invoice payments within 30 days had not yet been achieved, there was an improving trend in payments made both within 10 days and 30 days. She undertook to investigate the value of late payments, as well as how overdue they were and the type of invoices involved, and to bring forward further information in that regard.

The Committee:-

- i. scrutinised and **NOTED** the performance information for the Education Service; and
- ii. **AGREED** that further information be brought forward on late invoice payments.

15. SEEMiS Update
Cunntas air SEEMiS

There had been circulated Report No EDU/21/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

It was queried whether the Council should be working with other local authorities to develop a new system given that technology had moved on so much. In response, it was confirmed that the Council was working closely with leading providers on the development of a new Scotland-wide system to ensure that it was fit for purpose.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the current position of SEEMiS as the Management Information System used by all schools;
- ii. the challenges and limitations associated with the current system; and
- iii. the risks associated with both continuing with SEEMiS and sourcing an alternative solution.

16. Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026 - 2029
Plana Com-pàirteach Seirbheisean Chloinne na Gàidhealtachd 2026–2029

There had been circulated Report No EDU/22/26 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

The Committee **NOTED**:-

- i. the work undertaken by the Integrated Children's Services Plan Board in producing the draft Highland Children's Services Partnership Plan 2026 - 2029. This plan would be formally signed off by the Community Planning Partnership Board; and
- ii. the plan, which had been approved by the Integrated Children's Services Planning Board.

17. 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 held on 16 March 2026.

18. Membership of Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee

The Committee:-

- * i. **AGREED TO RECOMMEND** to the Council that Ms L Dundas be appointed to the Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee; and
- ii. otherwise **AGREED** the revised membership of the Educational Trust Fund Sub-Committee as tabled.

At this stage, the Chair paid tribute to Fiona Grant, Chief Officer – Secondary Education, who was leaving the Council. He thanked her for her contribution to education in Highland as a teacher, Head Teacher and Chief Officer, and wished her well for the future.

The meeting concluded at 1.00 pm.