

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL**EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE****SKYPE MEETING, 28 JANUARY, 2021**

Present: Councillors G Owen (Chair), R Bruce (Vice Chair), K Adam, N Baillie (as substitute for Councillor L McAllister), D Beagrie, C Buchan, S Calder (as substitute for Councillor A Evison), S Dickinson, M Ford, J Gifford, M Ingleby, R McKail, A Simpson, L Wilson, Mr D Bilsland and Ms C Eade.

Apologies: Councillors A Evison, L McAllister, Mrs Paterson

Officers: Director of Education and Children's Services, Head of Children's Services, Interim Head of Resources and Performance, Head of Education, Head of Commercial & Procurement, Team Manager (Resources and Performance), Learning Estates Team Leader (Resources and Performance), Business Support & Performance Manager, Passenger Transport Manager, Team Manager (Finance), Principal Solicitor (Legal & People), and Committee Officer (Kasia Balina).

At the outset of the meeting the Chair welcomed Anne-Marie Davies Macleod, new Interim Head of Resources and Performance and Councillor Jim Gifford as a new member of the committee in place of Councillor Judy Whyte and thanked Councillor Whyte for her contribution to the Committee.

1. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Chair asked Members if they had any interests to declare, in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

Councillor Adam declared an interest in respect of Item 13 due to having a child on the waiting list for school transport. Having applied the objective test, she had concluded the interest was significant, and therefore would not participate in the consideration of the item.

2. RESOLUTIONS**2A. STATEMENT ON EQUALITIES**

In taking decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010:-

- (1) to have due regard to the need to:-
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) advance equality and opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and

- (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
- (2) to consider, where an equality impact assessment has been provided, its contents and to take those into consideration when reaching a decision.

2B. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 50A (4) and (5) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the items specified below so as to avoid disclosure of exempt information of the classes described in the undernoted paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

Item No	Paragraph No of Schedule 7A
15	8

3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE OF 3 DECEMBER, 2020

On consideration of the circulated Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 3 December, 2020, Members **approved** it as a correct record.

4. PROGRESS WITH OUTSTANDING ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

There was circulated a report by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which updated Members on progress with actions agreed at previous meetings of the Education and Children's Services Committee held since 29 August, 2019.

The Director of Education and Children's Services introduced the report and provided a verbal update to the Committee. The importance of parental engagement (Item 3) was highlighted in the context of pandemic. Members were also provided with the positive examples of best practice from across Aberdeenshire, including Westhill Academy's recent surveys with both young people and parents.

After consideration, the Committee **agreed**:-

- (1) to note the current position in respect of actions arising from previous meetings; and
- (2) that those actions which had been completed should be removed from the outstanding actions list.

5. EQUALITIES PRESENTATION

The Business Strategy Manager and Strategic Policy Lead, Engagement and Equalities, gave a presentation to the Committee on Equalities Principles.

The detailed presentation covered areas including protected characteristics; relevant legislation; Equality Impact Assessments; and duties of Elected Members in respect of Equalities.

The Committee commended the informative presentation and **agreed** that a training session on Equalities be arranged in due course.

6. COVID-19 VERBAL UPDATE

The Director of Education and Children's Services provided an update on steps taken within the Service to respond to the pandemic situation.

It was highlighted that Aberdeenshire's school attendance rate and staff attendance continued to be positive. Around 9% of Aberdeenshire's pupils had been in school at some point during lockdown. Members were also updated on progress with the rolling out of additional digital devices. The Head of Education advised that as consistent approach as possible was taken across Aberdeenshire and the school staff were trying to identify the families with most need. It was also highlighted that there would be a balance in terms of pupil-led learning and live online learning at a school level.

In terms of the Scottish Qualifications Agency (SQA) assessment update, it was confirmed that the Service was involved in SQA national discussions and the staff were involved in how best to take the assessment process forward.

Members expressed their appreciation for teaching and support staff.

The Committee **noted** the ongoing response of the Service to the Covid-19 pandemic.

7. NORTHERN ALLIANCE REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVE – PROGRESS UPDATE REPORT

There had been circulated a report dated 4 December, 2020 by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which provided an update on progress achieved in the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC) and the progress on the Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plan.

The Director of Education and Children's Services introduced the report and explained that the number of frontline practitioners engaging with Northern Alliance officers had increased and the team were attracting large audiences to career-long professional learning events. It was also highlighted that one of the biggest developments since the Northern Alliance last shared an update with the Committee had been each local authority committing to the recruitment of a digital head teacher to tackle the future potential of online learning.

Members commended the progress and the number and depth of workstream activity.

During discussion, the Committee highlighted matters including: the importance of addressing the poverty related attainment gap; the Doric language; and the role that parents played in young people's lives.

The Committee **agreed** to: -

- (1) note the progress of the Northern Alliance, as outlined in the Progress and Impact Report 2019-20 and the amended Regional Improvement Plan: Phase 3;
- (2) note the financial implications as detailed in the report; and
- (3) instruct Officers to organise a workshop / briefing session on tackling poverty and inequalities at Aberdeenshire level, including local examples.

8. REZONE OF HILLSIDE SCHOOL

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Kincardine and Mearns Area Committee of 3 March 2020 (Item 5) when a report regarding the rezone of Hillside School was considered, there was circulated a report dated 15 December, 2020 by the Director of Education and Children's Services seeking approval of the recommendation within the consultation report as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

As a result of the consultation process officers recommended that the Leathan Fields site should not be rezoned to either Portlethen or Fishermoss School and that it should remain within the catchment area for Hillside School. Members were also informed that if both the Kincardine and Mearns Area Committee and Education and Children's Services Committee agreed with the recommendation then the rezoning would not be implemented. On that basis, alternative solutions would be required in order for Education and Children's Services to remove their objection to the planning application considered at the meeting of Kincardine and Mearns Area Committee on 10 December 2019 (Item 13).

Having considered the report, the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) acknowledge the Proposal Document, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report regarding the rezone of Hillside School; and
- (2) approve the recommendation within the consultation report that the Leathan Fields site should not be rezoned to either Portlethen or Fishermoss Schools and that it should remain within the catchment area for Hillside School.

9. GARTLY PRIMARY SCHOOL – UPDATE

With reference to the Minute of the Meeting of the Marr Area Committee of 17 December 2019 (Item 14), when the Committee considered a report on the background and implications of the oil spill at Gartly School, there was circulated a report dated 16 December, 2020 by the Director of Education and Children's Services which provided Members with an update and outlined potential next steps.

Members discussed the report and acknowledged the difficult situation for all involved. It was highlighted that pupils had to move out of the school building due to the oil leak at the end of 2018 and the site remained contaminated. During discussion, it was confirmed that the acceptable defined maximum level of contamination for the existing site to be reinstated as a school was zero. It was also

explained that ongoing engagement with parents and carers, as well as staff, would remain a priority and the Learning Estates Team would advise families on the next steps.

Having considered the report, the Committee **agreed** to: -

- (1) note the comments of Marr Area Committee on 24 November 2020, detailed in paragraph 3.14;
- (2) instruct officers to conduct a full options appraisal and extensive engagement on all options, including the reinstatement of Gartly School; and
- (3) feedback being provided to the Education and Children's Services Committee in June 2021.

10. STRACHAN SCHOOL CONSULTATION

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Education and Children's Services Committee of 5 December 2019 (Item 9) when the Committee approved the launch of a statutory consultation into the permanent closure of Strachan School, there was circulated a report dated 5 January, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services which sought Members' consideration on the consultation process on the closure of Strachan School.

Having noted the report, the Committee **agreed** to: -

- (1) acknowledge the formal consultation report attached as Appendix A to the report on the closure of Strachan School;
- (2) note the comments of Marr Area Committee on 15 December 2020; and
- (3) recommend to Full Council to close Strachan School and reassign its catchment area to create a dual zone between Banchory Primary School and Finzean School.

11. EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES DIRECTORATE SERVICE PLAN

With reference to (1) the Minute of Meeting of Aberdeenshire Council of 29 September 2017 (Item 5) when the Council Plan 2017-2022 was approved, including outlining 11 priorities that would steer the work of the Council and (2) the Minute of Meeting of Aberdeenshire Council of 23 July 2020 (Item 4) when it was agreed to adopt new Council principles and priorities to be embedded in a new Council Plan, and (3) the Minute of Meeting of Aberdeenshire Council of 7 October 2020 (Item 3) when it had been agreed to approve the amended version of the Council Plan 2020-2022 and associated priorities, there was circulated a report dated 14 January, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services seeking approval of the Education and Children's Services Directorate Plan and actions the Service would take in support of the Strategic Priorities as set out in the Council Plan 2020-22.

At this point in the proceedings, the Committee **agreed** to suspend Standing Order 2.1.2 to allow this item to be determined before adjourning for lunch.

Having discussed matters including: the setting up of priorities; closing the attainment gap; carbon reduction within learning estates; engagement of young people in decision making processes, the Committee **agreed to:-**

- (1) approve the Education and Children's Services Directorate Plan, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;
- (2) the further development of performance measures and targets relating the actions outlined in the Education and Children's Services Directorate Plan which would be reported to a future meeting of the Education and Children's Services Committee; and
- (3) request officers to add a glossary and an executive summary to future reports.

12. EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES CHARGING POLICY

With reference to (1) the Minute of Meeting of Aberdeenshire Council of 11 February 2016 (Item 6) when the Council's Corporate Charging Framework was agreed and (2) the Minute of Meeting of the Education and Children's Services Committee of 8 October 2020 (Item 7) when the Committee was provided with (a) supporting information on the access arrangements for educational sites and procedures to be introduced to support access by community users to educational establishments, and (b) the charges proposed for that use, there was circulated a report dated 3 December, 2020 by the Director of Education and Children's Services which explained that there was a requirement for Services to have an approved Charging Policy and that every third year a full review of each fee and charge would be undertaken. The report also detailed the proposed changes following an interim review.

Having discussed a full cost recovery and a revised inflationary rate, the Committee **agreed to: -**

- (1) note the proposals to maintain affordable prices for accessing Education facilities;
- (2) revise the Education prices to match those of Live Life Aberdeenshire;
- (3) the proposed prices detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, in principle, subject to approval of the inflation rate increase being delegated to the Head of Performance and Resources and agreed following consultation with Chair, Vice Chair and Opposition Spokesperson;
- (4) the interim charging measures to recover the additional expense of supplementary cleaning to allow lets to be facilitated on school sites;
- (5) delegate authority to the Head of Resources and Performance to approve pricing changes for keyholder lets without referring back to the ECS Committee until 31 August 2021; and
- (6) instruct officers to add an Equality Impact Assessment to the final report on Charging Policy.

13. SCHOOL TRANSPORT

With reference to (1) the Minute of Meeting of the Education and Children's Services Committee of 30 May 2019 (Item 14) when consideration was given to the work of the Passenger Transport Network Review Member Officer Group (MOWG) and (2) the Minute of Meeting of Education and Children's Services Committee of 5 December 2019 (Item 11) when the Committee agreed to revise the Council's privilege transport policy, the pending final implementation of the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations, 2000 (PSVAR), and sought a further report on the impact of the policy change following on 1 January 2020, there was circulated a report dated 21 December, 2020 by the Director of Education and Children's Services which provided details on the impact of the policy amendment and sought agreement on the criteria necessary to prioritise the allocation of spare seats on dedicated school transport services on a privilege basis.

The Committee were provided with information on: the statutory and policy framework underlying the provision of home-to-school transport in Aberdeenshire and the nature and scale of current provision; the impact of the change to privilege transport policy and work being progressed on school transport issues under the auspices of the Passenger Transport Network Review Member Officer Working Group which was linked to the 'Clean Sheet Review' of the supported bus network.

Having discussed the safety of pick up and drop off points, the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) note the statutory and policy framework governing the delivery of school transport services in Aberdeenshire;
- (2) note the current extent of school transport service delivery across and to/from Aberdeenshire;
- (3) note the impact of the change to privilege school transport policy with effect from 1 January 2019;
- (4) the criteria for prioritising the allocation/withdrawal of spare seats on closed school transport services on a privilege transport basis;
- (5) acknowledge the work undertaken by the Passenger Transport Network Review Member Officer Working Group to date;
- (6) note the current and proposed school transport actions that are being undertaken under the auspices of the Passenger Transport Network Review Member Officer Working Group;
- (7) the establishment of a member/officer working group to focus on school transport issues comprising of 5 members, following political proportionality as agreed by Council on 24 September 2020, namely three members from the Administration, one from the Partnership and one from the amalgamated small groups and individuals, with nominations being notified to the Director of

Education and Children's Services by the end of January 2020; and

- (8) approval of the Terms of Reference for the member/officer working group being agreed by the group at its first meeting including the chairing arrangements, following consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair and Opposition Spokesperson.

14. ANNUAL PROCUREMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT 2019-2020

With a reference to Section 18 of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014, which required every Scottish Local Authority to publish an annual procurement report on its regulated procurement activity, there had been circulated a report dated 22 December, 2020 by the Director of Business Services, which presented the Annual Procurement Report 2019-2020. The report included all regulated procurements completed during the financial year 2019 - 2020 and anticipated future procurement activity covering the next two financial years (2021-2023).

Having considered the report, the Committee **agreed** to note the content of the Annual Procurement Report 2019/2020 as detailed in Appendix A to the report and previously approved by the Business Services Committee on the 7 January 2021.

15. EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES DIRECTORATE SUPPLEMENTARY WORK PLAN

There had been circulated a report dated 24 December, 2020 by the Director of Education and Children's Services seeking approval for the addition of two items to the Education and Children's Services Directorate Procurement Plan, as approved by the Committee on 1 February 2018 (Item 14) and 5 December 2019 (Item 19).

After consideration, the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) approve the Directorate Supplementary Work Plan as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report;
- (2) approve the addition of both items to the Education and Children's Services Directorate Procurement Plan; and
- (3) acknowledge that the Director of Education and Children's Services has the delegated authority to award the contracts.