

## **REPORT TO EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE – 27 MAY 2021**

### **LITERACIES STRATEGY UPDATE**

#### **1 Reason for Report / Summary**

- 1.1 To provide an update on the progress of the development of a strategy for Aberdeenshire to support the improvements of key literacies and reduce the impact of low literacies levels.

#### **2 Recommendations**

**The Committee is recommended to:**

- 2.1 Consider the progress of the development of a literacies strategy for Aberdeenshire;**
- 2.2 Approve the ongoing direction and development of the strategy; and**
- 2.3 Agree to a first draft of the literacies strategy to be submitted to the Education and Children Services Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2021.**

#### **3 Purpose and Decision Making Route**

- 3.1 The Literacies strategy action plan has been presented to the Education and Children Services Committee in March and December 2019, May 2020 and most recently August 2020.
- 3.2 The report presented to the Education and Children Services Committee on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August 2020 gave an update on the consultation process and highlighted that between April and August 2020 limited progress had been made against the development of the strategy due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and that we recognised the emphasis of the strategy would be required to be reviewed considering the pandemic and that would be the focus for the remainder of 2020 and early 2021.
- 3.3 Committee agreed for a further update report to be provided in 2021 and this report was expected at the March 2021 Education and Children Services committee but was postponed until May 2021 due to limited progress due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions and staff capacity issues.
- 3.4 Between August 2020 and April 2021, a refocusing exercise has taken place through consultation with Local Learning Community Partnerships, Aberdeenshire Youth Forum and Local Youth Forums. This process has been carried out to ensure that the Literacies Strategy can support the recovery phase of the pandemic.

## 4 Discussion

- 4.1 Earlier drafts of the strategy acknowledged the broad range of contemporary definitions of literacies and the broad range of contexts upon which they can impact. Low literacies levels can present as a barrier to learning, employment, family, and community life. There is a broad range of individuals and communities of interest that share characteristics associated with higher levels of functional literacy skills. Improving literacies is a social justice imperative, ensuring learners are supported to maximise their potential to reach their goals and to be included. A seminar for key literacies partners, as previously reported to the Education and Children Services Committee, identified the key literacies where low levels can negatively impact on people's lives as; functional, emotional, financial, health and digital literacy.
- 4.2 One of the things that has been evident over the period of the pandemic, has been the impact of poor levels of health, financial, emotion and digital literacies in amplifying the negative impacts of COVID-19 and the associated restrictions. This experience and the degree to which the priorities within a literacies strategy should be adjusted required to be better understood. There needs to be a process of exploring this impact, and where and for whom it has been most significant to inform the development of the strategy to ensure it meets the emerging needs of our communities across Aberdeenshire during the recovery phase of the pandemic
- 4.3 Despite the restrictions which have accompanied the pandemic, engagement work and data collection has continued. This has included sessions with Aberdeenshire Youth Forum, local youth forums and Local Learning Community Partnerships focus meetings. A survey of digital skills has been carried out with recipients of ICT kit through the Connecting Scotland Scheme. We have also continued the dialogue with colleagues supporting the gypsy traveller community. We are also able to use data collected through a Scottish Government Adult Learning Strategy Consultation that took place in early 2021. The engagement sessions have provided an opportunity to include in the dialogue the impact of COVID-19 on the literacies needs of people living in Aberdeenshire. Feedback from these consultation sessions has emphasised the importance of continued support for the five key literacies; functional, emotional, financial, health and digital literacy but that some literacies areas will require a stronger focus to support the recovery phase from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4.4 Support for emotional and health literacies is high on the agenda for young people. Examples of what the young people have cited as being challenging included not being able to socialise and communicate with their friends, lack of structure at home and fears for the future. Young people highlighted the second lockdown has been harder to cope with than the previous one due to increasing pressures at home and school and that the main pressures for them are loneliness, isolation, and concerns about their education. Some young people spoke about bereavement and the impact that has had on their lives, highlighting that they have struggled to talk with professionals and friends, and this has left them feeling very isolated. Senior phase young people highlighted

concerns about upcoming assessment and exams and are worried about the impact of home schooling on their ability to achieve the grades needed to secure a place in further and higher education. Young people were in general optimistic about returning to full time education but were concerned about any future restrictions and the possible impact on their lives.

- 4.5 The Local Learning Community Partnerships (LLCP) highlighted specific concerns about those who have been shielding for a significant proportion of the last year, and the beginning of this year, and the impact that has had on mental health, isolation and loneliness. The impact of lockdown on elderly people was also highlighted in relation to accessing health appointments/advice and around understanding specific health messages from their health care providers and the Scottish Government. The LLCPs also raised concerns for adults and young people and more specifically older people aged 60+ who have little or no access to digital devices or the internet, noting that digital/online is now the default for almost everything in our society and there needs to be continued and increased support for people to access appropriate ICT kit and support to use applications relevant to individual need.
- 4.6 Community Learning and Development with the help of partners have distributed ICT kit through the Connecting Scotland scheme. Recipients of the ICT were asked to participate in a baseline survey to ascertain ICT ability. The baseline survey highlighted that those aged over 60+ required significantly more support with using their devices and accessing online applications than those aged 16-59.
- 4.7 Partnership working with the Gypsy Traveller liaison Officer and Gypsy Traveller Teacher to explore the impact of the pandemic on the Gypsy Traveller community has indicated that there will require to be a stronger focus on digital literacies and support for the community to use the ICT equipment received through Connecting Scotland. There is also a need to continue support with functional literacies where appropriate.
- 4.8 The Scottish Government Adult Learning Strategy consultation with Aberdeenshire Learners has given us data related to adult learning in general but for the purpose of the Literacies Strategy development, we are able to use some of the data generated to support the refocusing on the strategy. The data indicates that adult learners think that learning opportunities, including literacies support should continue to be a universal provision, offering opportunities for learning in local communities that are person centered and offer progression. It also highlighted the benefits and drawbacks of online learning and that learners would like to see a blended approach to literacies learning opportunities during the recovery phase.
- 4.9 Our engagement session and data collection has highlighted a need to ensure that the strategy reflects the emerging priorities for literacies and emphasises the contexts where low levels have the most impact. Literacies should be not been seen as a set of prescribed skills that need to be acquired but should be seen as complex critical capabilities that are fit to meet the needs of learners in an ever changing society. Being literate increases access to opportunities in all

aspects of life. Emotional literacies can support people to better understand and express their feelings. Digital literacies can support people to managing information, communicate, collaborate and use technology appropriately. Financial literacies can support the ability to make informed judgements and make effective decisions concerning the use and management of money. Health literacies can support the development of skills and confidence to understand and use health information appropriately, support people to be active partners in their own care and navigate health and social care systems.

- 4.10 The strategy will give a broad definition of literacies and also define the key characteristics of the five literacies: functional, emotional, financial, health and digital literacy. The strategy will address the impact of low levels of each literacy, the barriers that are created, the contexts in which these impacts are experienced and how service providers and others communicating with and supporting communities can ameliorate the impact and where appropriate support the strengthening of those literacy levels. Whilst our communities continue to recover from the pandemic and the impact on literacies in our communities is still emerging there will be a need to maintain a level of engagement work and revisit data collection. There will be engagement with the Aberdeenshire Learning Community Partnership (ALCP) and other key literacies partners to ensure that our findings are reported back and any new data are analysed and included in the strategy where appropriate. We will also use data captured through the Aberdeenshire Community Impact Assessment and any updates to analyse the emerging impact on individuals and communities. The development of the Aberdeenshire CLD Plan 2021-24 and the Adult Learning and Youth Work Strategies for Scotland will also assist in the development of the literacies strategy.

## **5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk**

- 5.1 This report helps deliver the strategic priority Education and Health & Wellbeing within the pillar 'Our People', having the right people, right places, right time and tackling poverty and Inequalities.

This report also helps deliver the strategic priority Resilient Communities within the pillar of 'Our Environment', having the right people, right places, right time and tackling poverty and Inequalities.

- 5.2 This report helps deliver against Aberdeenshire Children's Services Plan Priority – Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing

This report helps deliver on the LOIP Priority – Reducing Poverty and Health and Wellbeing

- 5.3 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		x	
Staffing		x	
Equalities	x		
Fairer Scotland Duty	x		
Town Centre First		x	
Sustainability		x	
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing		x	

5.4 An equality impact assessment has been carried out as part of the development of the proposals set out above. It is included as **Appendix 1** and there is a positive impact as follows:

Improve literacies outcomes for those communities of interest and individuals who low literacies levels have a negative impact on their opportunities to participate fully and effectively in community life.

5.5 No financial, staffing, town centre first or children and young people rights and wellbeing implication have been determined for this planned strategy as its purpose is to support the improvement of a range of literacies for those who literacies levels create barrier to life goals.

5.6 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level: No Risks have been identified

The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level: No risks have been identified

## 6 Scheme of Governance

6.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and had no comments to make and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

6.2 The Committee is able to consider [and take a decision on] this item in terms of Section E. 1.1 and E. 3.8 of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to Education and Community Learning and Development in terms of The Community Learning and Development Regulation 2013.

**Laurence Findlay**  
**Director of Education and Children Services**

Report prepared by Philip Boath, Interim Service Manager, Communities and Partnerships  
Date 29 April 2021

**Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment**

## APPENDIX 1

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

EIA Version	Date	Author	Changes
3	15/04/21	Philip Boath	Stage 2 – update of evidence gathered to date

Stage 1: Title and aims of the activity (“activity” is an umbrella term covering policies, procedures, guidance and decisions including those that affect services the council delivers).

Service	Education & Children Services
Section	Community Learning and Development & Aberdeenshire Learning Communities partnership
Title of the activity etc.	Aberdeenshire Literacies Strategy
Aims and desired outcomes of the activity	Those with low literacies are negatively impacted by the challenges and reduced opportunities those low levels present. Lower literacies levels exacerbate the inequalities of outcome associated with socio-economic disadvantage. The strategy seeks to highlight 5 core literacies and provide strategic guidance on how services can reduce the impact of low literacies, how those with literacies challenges can be linked to learning opportunities, and how improved learning outcomes can be achieved by those who seek to strengthen their literacies resulting in reduction in inequalities of outcome related to health, financial well-being, digital and social inclusion, and improve life chances.
Author(s) & Title(s)	Philip Boath Interim Service Manager (Communities and Partnerships).

Stage 2: List the evidence that has been used in this assessment and explain what it means in relation to the activity you are assessing.

Evidence	What does it say?	What does it mean?
Internal data (customer satisfaction surveys; equality monitoring data; customer complaints).	Consultation feedback from 6 area committees	

<p>Internal consultation with staff and other services affected.</p>	<p>5 seminars held focussed on; emotional, health, digital, functional and financial literacies. Staff participated from Education &amp; Children Services, Infrastructure Service and Health &amp; Social care. Consultation</p> <p>Consultation with Local Learning Community Partnerships</p>	<p>Seminars have helped develop the thinking for the concept and focus of strategic guidance, some key elements emerging from these sessions include: A developing understanding of the relevance of the specific literacies. Literacies should not be seen in isolation to each other. Appreciation of the impact low literacies levels</p> <p>LLCP consultation has supported focusing of literacies in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic. We now better understanding the emerging picture of literacies and a need to increase the focus on digital, emotional and financial literacies.</p>
<p>External consultation (partner organisations, community groups, and councils.</p>	<p>External consultation with community members and learners through questionnaires.</p> <p>5 Seminars held focussed on emotion, health, digital, functional and financial literacies. Stakeholders and Partners attended</p> <p>Engagement with gypsy travellers supported by the GT Liaison Officer. Continued engagement with GT Liaison Officer &amp; GT Teacher to understand developing need.</p> <p>Engagement with English as a Second Language (ESOL) Learners</p> <p>Engagement with young people through Aberdeenshire Youth Forum and Local Youth Voice/Platforms</p> <p>Engagement with care experienced young people</p> <p>Consultation with Local Learning Community Partnerships</p>	<p>Consultation with community members and learners has identified: Understanding of the terminology currently being used. Barriers to learning. Issues that learners may be facing Where we should focus our advertising</p> <p>Refocussing of literacies strategy in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic; Focus of literacies Emerging need</p>

<p>External data (census, available statistics).</p>	<p>A range of research has been used including:  Scotland Adult Literacies Curriculum Framework  Guidelines: learning, teaching and assessment;  Adult Learning in Scotland Statement of Ambition (2014);  ALIS 2020 and the Literacy Action plan:  CLD Strategic Guidance and Regulations;  Scotland's Adult ESOL Strategy 2015-2020;  Skills for Scotland;  Developing Scotland Young Workforce;  Scottish Government Adult Learning Consultation (Aberdeenshire Feedback);  National Improvement Framework;  Northern Alliance Emerging Literacies;  School Leavers Destination Information (SDS);  UNESCO Youth &amp; Adult Literacies in the time of COVID 19</p>	
<p>Other (general information as appropriate).</p>		

<p>Stage 3: Evidence Gaps.</p>	
<p>Are there any gaps in the information you currently hold?</p>	<p>We have identified the following specific communities of interest who are currently not represented in our consultation process; care experienced young people.</p>

<p>Stage 4: Measures to fill the evidence gaps.</p>		
<p>What measures will be taken to fill the information gaps before the activity is implemented? These should be included in the action plan at the back of this form.</p>	<p>Measures:</p>	<p>Timescale:</p>
	<p>Contact has been made with the Young Person Organising and Campaigning group (YPOC) but haven't made to secure a date for consultation.</p>	<p>May 2021</p>

Stage 5: What steps can be taken to promote good relations between various groups/areas?

These should be included in the action plan.

We will continue to make the best use of existing partnerships & relationships.  
Aberdeenshire Learning Community Partnership supports the fostering good partnership work across the sector.

Stage 6: How does the policy/activity create opportunities for advancing equality of opportunity?

It advances equality of opportunity through seeking to raise awareness of the barriers faced by those with low literacies levels and enables service providers to improve engagement and delivery practice. Through identifying those with lower literacies levels and signposting them to opportunities to strengthen their literacies, more people who face barriers to inclusion, employment and well being will be supported to improve their literacies and increase their life chances.

Stage 7a:

Are there potential impacts on protected groups?

The protected groups covered by the equality duty are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Who is affected by the activity or who is intended to benefit from the proposed activity and how?  
Complete the table below for each protected group by inserting "yes" in the applicable box/boxes below.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unknown
Age – Younger/Older	YES			
Age - Older	YES			
Disability	YES			
Race – (includes Gypsy Travellers)	YES			
Religion or Belief			YES	
Sex			YES	
Pregnancy and maternity				YES
Sexual orientation – (includes Lesbian/ Gay/Bisexual)			YES	

Gender reassignment – (includes Transgender)			YES	
Marriage and Civil Partnership				YES

Stage 7b: Do you have evidence or reason to believe that this policy, activity etc. will or may impact on socio-economic inequalities?

This is about trying to be fair to everyone. Part of that is realising that not everyone may be starting at the same place. Some individuals and families may have low income, may have very little or no savings which means they are living from month to month therefore changes to council policies/services may have a greater adverse impact on them. Some literacies such as functional (reading, writing) and health, have an association with socioeconomic status, therefore an improvement in literacies for residents in Aberdeenshire will have an impact on socio-economic inequalities.

On this basis you should consider potential impacts on individuals/families by:

- Place: on specific vulnerable areas or communities (SIMD, regeneration, rural) e.g. housing, transport.
- Pockets: household resources, (Income, benefits, outgoings) ability to access a service
- Prospects: peoples life chances e.g. access to, or ability to access: employment, training, services (such as council or health) or support.

Groups of people who may be impacted include, but not limited to:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unemployed</li> <li>• Single parents and vulnerable families</li> <li>• People on benefits</li> <li>• Those involved in the criminal justice system</li> <li>• People in the most deprived communities</li> <li>• People who live in rural areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pensioners</li> <li>• Looked after children</li> <li>• Carers including young carers</li> <li>• Veterans</li> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Single adult households</li> <li>• People who have experienced the asylum system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those leaving the care setting including children and young people and those with illness</li> <li>• Homeless people</li> <li>• People with low literacy/numeracy</li> <li>• People with lower educational qualifications</li> <li>• People I low paid work</li> <li>• People with one or more protected characteristic</li> </ul>
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Please complete by inserting “yes” in the applicable box/boxes below.

Socio-economic disadvantage	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unknown
Pockets: Low income/income poverty – cannot afford to maintain regular payments such as bills, food, clothing	YES			

Pockets: Low and/or no wealth – enough money to meet basic living costs and pay bills but have no savings to deal with any unexpected spends and no provision for the future			YES	
Pockets: Material deprivation – being unable to access basic goods and services i.e. financial products like life insurance, repair/replace broken electrical goods, warm home, leisure and hobbies			YES	
Place: Area deprivation – where you live, where you work			YES	
Prospects: Socioeconomic background – social class i.e. parents education, employment and income, educational achievement.	YES			

Stage 8: What are the positive and negative impacts?		
Impacts.	Positive (describe the impact for each of the protected characteristics affected)	Negative (describe the impact for each of the protected characteristics affected)
Please detail the potential positive and/or negative impacts you have highlighted above. Detail the impacts and describe those affected.	<b>Pockets:</b> The Literacies strategy will highlight that low literacies are associated with both as a factor effecting and affected by poverty. That one of the key factors linked to lower literacy capabilities is poverty, with adults living in deprived areas are more likely to have literacies capabilities at the lower end of the scale.	
	<b>Prospects:</b> the development of the literacy strategy will highlight that high quality literacies support with options for accredited learning support the improvement of peoples life chances.	

Stage 9: Have any of the affected groups/areas been involved, engaged with or consulted?

If yes, please give details of how this was done and what the results were. If no, how have you ensured that you can make an informed decision about mitigating steps?

Whilst we haven't specifically target those from low socio economic or low income backgrounds we have had a broad range of people take part in our consultation process

Stage 10: What mitigating steps will be taken to remove or reduce negative impacts?

These should be included in any action plan at the back of this form.

Mitigating Steps

Timescale

Consultation care experience young people (Young Persons Organising Committee)

May 2021

Stage 11: What monitoring arrangements will be put in place? How the EIA will be used to monitor the proposal

These should be included in any action plan (for example customer satisfaction questionnaires).

As part of the strategy a monitoring process will be proposed to identify the impact of the strategy on the provision of support for those with low literacy levels and the numbers of learners engaged in literacies learning and the impact of that learning will be promoted.

Stage 12: What is the outcome of the Assessment?

Please complete the appropriate box/boxes	1	No negative impacts have been identified –please explain.
	No negative impact have been identified	
	2	Negative Impacts have been identified, these can be mitigated - please explain. * Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen.
	3	The activity will have negative impacts which cannot be mitigated fully – please explain. * Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen

\* Stage 13: Set out the justification that the activity can and should go ahead despite the negative impact.

Stage 14: Sign off and authorisation.				
Sign off and authorisation.	1) Service and Team	Education & Children Service – Community Learning & Development		
	2) Title of Policy/Activity	Aberdeenshire Literacy Strategy (if appropriate)		
	3) <b>Authors:</b> I/We have completed the equality impact assessment for this policy/activity.	Name: Philip Boath Position: Interim Service Manager- Communities & Partnership Date: Signature:	Name: Position: Date: Signature:	
		Name: Position: Date: Signature:	Name: Position: Date: Signature:	
	4) Consultation with Service Manager	Name: Date:		
	5) Authorisation by Director or Head of Service	Name: Position: Date:	Name: Position: Date:	
	6) If the EIA relates to a matter that has to go before a Committee, Committee report author sends the Committee Report and this form, and any supporting assessment documents, to the Officers responsible for monitoring and the Committee Officer of the relevant Committee.			Date:
	7) EIA author sends a copy of the finalised form to: equalities@aberdeenshire.gov.uk			Date:

Action Plan					
Action	Start	Complete	Lead Officer	Expected Outcome	Resource Implications
Consultation care experienced young people	May 2021	May 2021	C Bell	Inform strategy	None