

## ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

### EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

#### SKYPE MEETING, 7 OCTOBER, 2021

**Present:** Councillors G Owen (Chair), R Bruce (Vice Chair), D Beagrie, C Buchan, S Dickinson, A Evison, M Ford, J Gifford, M Ingleby, L McAllister, R McKail, S Powell, A Simpson, L Wilson, Mr D Bilsland and Ms C Eade.

**Apologies:** Mrs R Paterson.

**Officers:** Director of Education and Children's Services, Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships, Head of Resources and Performance, Head of Children's Services, Area Manager (Amanda Roe), Head of Education, Head of Finance, Service Manager (Education Development), Service Manager (Lifelong Learning and Leisure), Quality Improvement Manager (Resources and Performance), Learning Estates Team Leader (Resources and Performance), Early Years Estate Manager, Team Manager (Resources and Performance), Social Work Manager, Team Manager (Adoption), Tackling Poverty & Inequalities Co-ordinator, Catering Services Managers, Team Manager (Fostering), Business Strategy Manager (Customer and Digital Services), Business Partner, Principal Solicitor (Legal and People), and Committee Officer (Kasia Balina).

#### INTRODUCTION

At the outset of the meeting the Chair welcomed all members and officers to the first hybrid meeting of Education and Children's Services Committee. She also welcomed Councillor Sheila Powell as a new member of the Committee.

The Committee expressed appreciation to all teachers, on the World Teachers' Day, and thanked them for their work, help and support provided to children and young people. The Committee also commended the work done by Equalities Team in promoting the Black History Month among young people in Aberdeenshire schools.

#### 1. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Chair asked Members if they had any interests to declare, in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. No interests were declared.

#### 2. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

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.

### **3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE OF 26 AUGUST, 2021**

On consideration of the circulated Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 26 August, 2021, Members **agreed** to approve 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 Committee held since 27 August, 2020.

Thereafter, and having considered Members' comment regarding the update on the transport assessment and the appointment of a School Crossing Patroller for Meethill Road, Peterhead, 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. COVID-19 VERBAL UPDATE**

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

It was highlighted that children and young people, as well as parents and staff, were very pleased with the return to school after the summer break. The pupil attendance rate and staff attendance were positive despite the rising number of Covid-19 cases across Aberdeenshire. The Committee found young people following the guidance, including the mask wearing.

It was highlighted that a vast amount of work had been focused on providing support to children and young people who were struggling to adapt to the school routine. Mental and physical health of young people, their wellbeing and managing raising expectations of parents were among the most common concerns raised by schools. It was also noted that Covid-19 had a big impact on the development of the youngest pupils. Members were also informed about the inspection of activities carried in the Aberdeenshire schools this year.

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

## **6. NORTHERN ALLIANCE REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVE – PROGRESS UPDATE REPORT.**

There was circulated a report dated 2 September, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which outlined the progress achieved by the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Collaborative and the progress on Phase 3 Regional Improvement Plan.

Having noted Members' comments on the digital transformation, staff interested in e-Learning opportunities, improvement of employability skills and the young workforce, Equity Week benefits, and hidden aspects of poverty, the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) acknowledge the progress of the Northern Alliance as outlined in the Progress & Impact Report 2020-21 and the amended Regional Improvement Plan: Phase 3;
- (2) note the financial implications as outlined; and
- (3) instruct Officers to bring back to the Committee the information on the number of workstreams participants from Aberdeenshire.

## **7. OECD: "SCOTLAND'S CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE: INTO THE FUTURE" AND UPPER-SECONDARY EDUCATION STUDENT ASSESSMENT IN SCOTLAND: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE"**

There was circulated a report dated 2 September, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services which explained that in 2021 two significant reports had been published in relation to Scottish Education, both by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development). The first was a critique of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, providing some key recommendations for the future, and the second was in relation to upper-secondary education student assessment and was written in response to the difficulties which arose from the cancellation of the SQA examination diets in 2020 and 2021. Both reports were likely to have significant implications for the future direction of Scottish education.

Thereafter, the Committee **agreed** to: -

- (1) acknowledge both reports and note the potential implications for the education system in Aberdeenshire which may arise from recommendations within the reports; and
- (2) instruct Officers to organise a workshop for Members on issues raised in both reports by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

## **8. CRITERIA AND PARAMETERS FOR MOTHBALLING A SCHOOL**

There was circulated a report dated 23 September, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which proposed set criteria for the mothballing of a school and set out the parameters to be considered if a school was mothballed.

Members were advised that the Service would begin a mothballing process if a school roll fell to eight pupils or under. The start of the process would not mean that

a school would be closed, the ultimate decision would remain with the Director of Education and Children's Services.

Following discussion, Councillor Evison moved, seconded by Councillor McAllister, to not approve the proposal in paragraph 3.4 that when a primary school had eight or fewer pupils, then the Director of Education and Children's Services should consider mothballing but in the case of an individual school where mothballing was considered appropriate, the particular criteria in paragraphs 4.2 - 4.7 should be used.

As an amendment, Councillor Gifford moved, seconded by Councillor Bruce, to support the recommendations as detailed in paragraph 3.4 of the report.

Members of the Committee voted:

for the motion	4	Councillors Buchan, Evison, Ford and McAllister.
for the amendment	9	Councillors Owen, Bruce, Beagrie, Dickinson, Gifford, Ingleby, McKail, Powell and Simpson.
absent from division	1	Councillor Wilson.

The amendment was carried and the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) approve the proposal in paragraph 3.4 that when a primary school had eight or fewer pupils, then the Director of Education and Children's Services should consider mothballing; and
- (2) approve the criteria involved in the process of mothballing a school as detailed in paragraphs 4.2 – 4.7 of the report.

## **9. FISHERFORD AND EASTERFIELD SCHOOL**

There was circulated a report dated 23 September, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services which informed Members of the decision to mothball Fisherford and Easterfield Schools from August 2021.

The Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) note the mothballing of both Easterfield and Fisherford Schools; and
- (2) instruct the Director of Education & Children's Services to provide an update report to the Education and Children's Services Committee in May 2022.

## **10. FRASERBURGH PRIMARY SCHOOL PROVISION**

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of Aberdeenshire Council of 17 March, 2021 (Item 7), when a commitment had been made to progress delivery of a new Primary School in Fraserburgh to replace the existing St Andrew's School and Fraserburgh North School, there was circulated a report dated 13 September, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services which provided Members with an update on work

that had been undertaken to date, by officers, in relation to the provision of the new 450 pupil capacity Primary School in Fraserburgh.

The Committee Members were advised that widespread consultation in Fraserburgh, as well as informal community engagement, would take place as the plans involve school closures and a school merger.

Thereafter, the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) note the work being progressed to reconfigure the Primary School estate in Fraserburgh and progress with the potential merger of St Andrews School and Fraserburgh North School, into new purpose-built provision; and
- (2) instruct officers to provide update on the consultation process, funding, and project progress.

## **11. STONEHAVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL PROVISION**

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of Aberdeenshire Council of 17 March, 2021 (Item 7), when a commitment had been made to progress delivery of a new Primary School in Stonehaven to replace Dunnottar Primary School, there was circulated a report dated 13 September, 2021, by the Director of Education and Children's Services which provided an update on work that had been undertaken by officers to assess and evaluate proposals to relocate Dunnottar School and Carronhill School to new build provision.

The Members were updated on the progress of an upgrade of the primary school estate in Stonehaven and were informed that two options were under consideration, subject to assessment and feasibility work. The first option was the replacement of Dunnottar Primary School replaced with a new 217 capacity primary. The second option proposed that a new shared campus on the grounds of Mackie Academy would be constructed. It would include a new 217 capacity primary school replacing Dunnottar Primary School and Carronhill School and both schools would be alongside the existing Mackie Academy building. There would be consultation and informal community engagement on both proposals because they involved relocation and a rezoning exercise.

Following discussion, the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) note the work being progressed on the replacement of Dunnottar Primary School; and
- (2) acknowledge the second option identified which proposed the inclusion of a replacement Carronhill School as part of any project.

## **12. ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE FUNDED PROVIDERS**

There was circulated a report dated 6 September, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services which provided an update in relation to the ongoing work to support the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector in supporting the delivery of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) across Aberdeenshire.

The Committee were advised of the support given to the Private, Voluntary and Independent sector (PVI) with the roll out of Early Learning and Childcare.

Following discussion, the Committee **agreed** to acknowledge work and actions to date.

### **13. CARBON BUDGET SIX-MONTHLY UPDATE**

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of Aberdeenshire Council of 18 March, 2020 (Item 10), when it had been agreed to instruct each Director to submit Carbon Budget update, at six monthly intervals, to relevant policy committees and to the Sustainability Committee, there was circulated a report dated 7 September, 2021, by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which (1) provided an update on the proposed projects that had been highlighted for progression during 2020/21 in Education and Children's Services and Live Life Aberdeenshire (LLA), and (2) highlighted the work on the development of Education and Children's Services Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy on a short, medium and long-term action plan for the Service to ensure sustainable practices became embedded in the day-to-day work of the Service.

Members made comments on food recycling and waste, single-use plastic containers used in vending machines, the amount of paper being used in education, involvement of young people in discussion, the project 'Bin it', taking the local initiatives into account in the decision process, and the need for carbon reduction associated with capital projects.

Thereafter, the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) acknowledge the Education and Children's Services Carbon Budget six-monthly update, as appended to the report, and the development of the Education and Children's Services Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy;
- (2) the ongoing responsibility of each Director to secure their reduction targets as set out in the Carbon Budget, and to report progress at six-monthly to the relevant Policy Committees and to the Sustainability Committee; and
- (3) request a report on school transport and carbon emissions to a future meeting.

The Committee agreed to suspend Standing Order 2.1.2, in order to allow the meeting to continue beyond 1.00p.m.

### **14. ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2020**

There was circulated a report dated 7 July, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which detailed the 2020 Annual Report for Aberdeenshire's Adoption Service. The report detailed the framework for family finding for Aberdeenshire's most vulnerable children requiring an adoptive family, and the services available to anyone affected by adoption through the work of the Adoption Team.

The Committee commented on Aberdeenshire's Performance Panel; reasons for the lower number of adoptions, and virtual courses offered to prospective adoptive families.

Thereafter, the Committee **agreed** to continue to support the ongoing recruitment of adoptive families across Aberdeenshire and to provide support to all persons affected by adoption.

## **15. FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2020**

There was circulated a report dated 6 August, 2021, by the Director of Education and Children's Services which highlighted the functions of the Council's Fostering Service in recruiting, assessing, approving and supporting fostering households to meet the needs of Aberdeenshire's children who required to be looked after away from home in an alternative family arrangement. The Service's Annual Report for 2020 was included as an appendix.

The Committee were advised how foster carers met the challenges of home schooling and keeping children safe during the pandemic and how the Service adapted to the changes to the working environment caused by Covid-19. The Fostering Social Workers, in addition to free online training, provided support and supervision virtually through telephone and online meetings, and physically distanced face-to-face contact.

The Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) note Members' comments regarding the recruitment of foster carers, the process to become permanent foster carers, and the long term impact and stigma in relation to being in care; and
- (2) continue to support the Fostering Service's recruitment campaigns.

## **16. BRIEFING ON THE HOLISTIC FAMILY SUPPORT PILOT PROJECTS**

Reference was made to the Minute of Meeting of Aberdeenshire Council of 29 April, 2021 (Item 5) when Members had been advised of the outcome of the Independent Care Review – The Promise, and Aberdeenshire Council's response to date. Further reference was made to a request that had been made for additional information to be provided to Councillors on the Holistic Family Support Workstreams. In this regard there was circulated a report dated 5 September, 2021, by the Director of Education and Children's Services which provided a summary of the work being undertaken to deliver against the Promise through the piloting of the Holistic Family Support Projects.

The Committee **made** comments on working with partner organisations from the Third Sector, the complexity of issues in local communities, cost of placements, plans for developing the program, and the involvement in supporting more children.

Thereafter the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) note the progress of the Holistic Family Support Projects as part of Aberdeenshire Council's response to The Promise; and

- (2) receive a further update in 12 months, to be delivered to the Committee in the form of a workshop.

## **17. TACKLING POVERTY AND INEQUALITIES – CHILD POVERTY ACTION REPORT**

There was circulated a report dated 15 September, 2021, by the Director of Education and Children's Services which provided the Committee with an update on progress with the actions within the Child Poverty Action Plan and requested comments on the draft Year 3 Child Poverty Action Report.

The report outlined the work undertaken by the Council and its partners in meeting the challenges of reducing child poverty during the Covid-19 global pandemic. Positive aspects were highlighted: increased household income for those living in poverty and those at the highest risk of poverty; improved social mobility and engagement with the employment market in Aberdeenshire; improved employment conditions and household income for those experiencing in-work poverty and increased health, wellbeing and educational attainment.

The Committee made comments on how to maximise income and improve employability for families on a low income, how to reduce the impact that Covid-19 had on the financial position of families across Aberdeenshire, and the rising number of children affected by poverty. Members also thanked partner organisations who had worked with Council to provide support to those who needed it most during the pandemic.

Thereafter, the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) acknowledge and support the progress made in tackling poverty in Aberdeenshire and to provide comments to the Communities Committee which will inform the final Local Child Poverty Action Report; and
- (2) instruct officers to circulate the 'Worried About Money' leaflet to the Committee.

## **18. LIVE LIFE ABERDEENSHIRE – ECS HOLIDAY RECOVERY PROGRAMME**

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 27 May, 2021 (Item 7), when it had been agreed to implement a Holiday Recovery Programme for children and young people across Aberdeenshire following the Council commitment of £2 million from reserves, in addition to the additional funding provided by the Scottish Government of £560,000 for activities for children and young people under the national banner of Summer of Play, there was circulated a report dated 8 September, 2021, by the Director of Education and Children's Services which provided an update on the ECS Holiday Recovery Programme – Summer of Play and plans and budget requirements for activities during the October holiday period.

The Committee commented on the proposals for Holiday Recovery provisions in the October break, specifically mental health support, going beyond the school based

approach, using social media to reach more young people, the positive impact the programme had on communities and next year's programme.

Thereafter, the Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) acknowledge the success and impact of Summer of Play;
- (2) the draw down of allocated budget to provide funding to academies for use in the provision of study support for senior phase pupils as set out in section 4.14 of the report;
- (3) note the provision of a 4 week holiday recovery programme in Summer 2022; and
- (4) receive a further report in December 2021 on the delivery of the October programme.

## **19. SCHOOL CATERING REVIEW: UPDATE ON PROGRESS**

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 27 August, 2020 (Item 7), when it had been indicated that a catering review would be conducted, there was circulated a report dated 9 September, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services which provided an update on the progress of the ongoing School Catering Review, including the background and context of the review and the activity progressed to date across the workstreams.

The Committee made comments on the new food regulations, the introduction of percentage measure for grams of sugar per portion of food, sugar substitutes, the financial and environmental aspect of food waste, recycling systems introduced in Aberdeenshire schools, single-use drinks containers and traditional Scottish meals.

The Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) note the background to the review and acknowledge the key contextual drivers to the review; and
- (2) acknowledge the activity progressed to date and next steps.

## **20. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AS AT 31 AUGUST 2021**

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of Aberdeenshire Council of 17 March, 2021 (Item 5), when approval had been given to the Education and Children's Services Revenue Budget for the financial year 2021/2022 and 24 June, 2021 when an additional £2.6m budget allocation had been approved to increase the overall budget to £350.7m, there was circulated a report dated 15 September, 2021 by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which (1) provided financial performance information pertaining to the areas of service delivery for which the Committee had responsibility, (2) highlighted the financial information and forecast position, as at 31 August, 2021, and (3) listed the number of emerging issues, together with actions taken to address those considerations.

The Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) note the financial information and forecast position, as at 31 August, 2021, and endorse the budget movements set out in Appendix 4b to the report;
- (2) note the progress in achieving the agreed savings, as detailed in Appendix 3; and
- (3) instruct officers to provide a briefing on money allocation (out of authority placements) and the impact of the rising energy costs in Education and Children's Services premises.

## **21. CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT PLAN QUARTERLY REPORT**

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of Audit Committee of 17 September, 2020 (Item 8) when it had been agreed that (1) all Corporate Improvement Action Plans would be merged into a Corporate Improvement Plan (the Plan), and (2) the Plan would be reported to the Audit Committee and Policy Committees on a quarterly basis to enhance transparency and accountability and to provide Members with assurance around the progression of agreed actions, there was circulated a report dated 31 August, 2021, by the Director of Business Services which provided an update on the implementation of actions in the Corporate Improvement Plan, which incorporated actions from the Annual Governance Statement Action Plan 2019, Annual Governance Statement Action Plan 2020, How Good Is Our Governance 2020 Action Plan and Best Value Action Plan 2020.

The Committee **agreed** to:-

- (1) note the Corporate Improvement Plan ("the Plan"), attached as Appendix 1 to the report;
- (2) note that the Plan had been considered by the meeting of the Audit Committee on 16 September 2021; and
- (3) receive quarterly updates.

## **22. CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY**

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 1 July, 2021 (Item 13), there had been circulated a report dated 16 September, 2021, by the Director of Business Services which provided the draft Risk Management Policy, which had been developed following consultation with the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT).

The report outlined the development process of the draft policy, which would be underpinned by a Risk Appetite Statement, comprehensive Risk Management Guidance and Risk Register Templates, encompassing the Corporate Risk Register, Directorate Risk Registers and Service Risk Registers.

Following discussion, the Committee **agreed** to note the draft Risk Management Policy as set out in an appendix to the report.