

MINUTES

A&B – Public

Education and Families Committee
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lerwick
Friday 28 June 2019 at 10.00am

Present:

Councillors:

P Campbell	C Hughson
E Macdonald	R McGregor
D Sandison	G Smith
T Smith	R Thomson
B Wishart	

Religious Representatives:

M Tregonning

Apologies:

S Coutts	J Fraser
H Rankine	T Macintyre

In Attendance:

H Budge, Director – Children’s Services
R Calder, Acting Executive Manager – Quality Improvement
W Lowrie, Interim Executive Manager – Children’s Social Work
D Morgan, Executive Manager – Criminal Justice/Interim Chief Social Work Officer
V Simpson, Executive Manager – Community Planning and Development
R Sinclair, Executive Manager - Assets, Commissioning and Procurement
B Leask, Team Leader – Youth Services and Employability
J Porter, Team Leader – Community Development
S Flaws, Quality Improvement Officer – Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)
K Johnston, Solicitor
T Langley, Operational Lead – Remote Teaching
E Perring, Policy Manager
M Thomson, Management Accountant
L Geddes, Committee Officer

Chairperson

Mr G Smith, Chair of the Committee, presided.

Circular

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

The Chair advised that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills had now confirmed that he was satisfied with the progress that local authorities were making in terms of the empowerment agenda, and would not be legislating at this time. He paid tribute to those involved in helping put this argument forward to the Scottish Government - including COSLA, ADES, Northern Alliance and local authority staff themselves.

He went on to speak about the Eco Youth strike and march that had recently taken place, and advised he had made a commitment to the young people that they could come to the September meeting of the Committee and give a presentation about climate change. Further to his commitment to have the MSYPs at Committee meetings, he also intended to find a way of having a regular agenda item for young people as they had indicated that they did not feel that their voice was being heard.

Declarations of Interest

None

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 May 2019 were confirmed on the motion of Mr Campbell, seconded by Ms Wishart.

18/19 Shetland Community Learning and Development (CLD) Plan 2018-2021

The Committee considered a report by the Team Leader – Community Development and the Team Leader – Youth Services and Employability (DV-17-19-F) presenting the CLD Plan 2018-21.

The Team Leader – Community Development summarised the main terms of the report, advising that there was a statutory duty to present the Plan every three years. It had been due for publication in September 2018, but this had been delayed in order to ensure that it aligned with the Shetland Partnership Plan delivery plans.

Responding to questions, she said that while capacity to deliver was an issue, there was optimism that all partners would come on board to deliver the key issues and actions. There were lead officers for each action, and they would be refined and developed in order to get measurable outcomes. It was hoped that as much as possible could be done within existing resources, but consideration would have to be given to realigning priorities and refocusing resources.

The Director of Children's Services added that there were a number of plans relating to children and child poverty that referred to the Shetland Partnership Plan, and it was important that they were better integrated and connections were made between them.

The Chair commented that as project work tended to only be funded for the short-term, it was a challenge to mainstream these projects. Community Development was an area that had seen significant reductions, with little funding available beyond staffing budgets, so the Council should bear this in mind when considering its budgets. Youth services work sometimes had to be targeted towards early intervention and preventative work at the expense of universal services. It was important that outcomes could be demonstrated so that more resources could be directed there and capacity could be increased.

Decision:

The Committee APPROVED the Shetland Community Learning and Development Plan 2018-21.

Annual Child Poverty Action Report

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services (CS-18-19-F) presenting Shetland's first Annual Child Poverty Action Report (ACPAR).

The Director of Children's Services summarised the main terms of the report, advising that work was taking place with partners to ensure that statutory and interim targets could be met. The Scottish Government had given initial feedback on the delivery plan, and had highlighted the specific challenges related to the nature of the community and the importance of working together to reduce child poverty. It was recognised that child poverty levels in Shetland were low, but the high cost of living may mean that more children face financial hardship than indicated. While the Report illustrated a number of achievements, there was still a lot more to do to increase awareness and tackle child poverty.

It was suggested that more information could be added to the Report to explain what "living well" actually means, and that there could be reference to childcare as it could be a significant factor in child poverty.

The Policy Manager said that more information could be added to the Report to explain "living well", but it related to what was required to achieve an acceptable standard of living – to include minimum standards but also things like social activities. There were differences across regions in the United Kingdom.

The Director of Children's Services advised that ELC was currently being expanded, and there would be more settings and more hours delivered which would make a difference to people. However more reference could be included in the Report.

The Quality Improvement Officer – ELC added that through the work that had taken place with the expansion of ELC, Children's Services were very aware of the difficulties in relation to the bigger picture beyond statutory provision – particularly in relation to care for 0-3 year olds, after-school care, and school holiday care. The ELC project board would be considering the impact that the expansion of ELC would have locally, but this was an issue that was wider than the Council and there was a need for it to be looked at.

It was commented that factors affecting levels of child poverty often related to circumstances outwith the Council's control – such as electricity price increases. It was questioned if consideration had been given to the wider causes.

The Policy Officer said that Shetland was in a strong position in being able to carry out work locally within the resources available. The Council's Energy Unit was carrying out a programme of work to improve housing standards, and the Citizens Advice Bureau also offered fuel poverty advice.

The Chair added that the Council could do more to address issues with the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM), as the decision to set a maximum cost had had unintended consequences locally because many houses had "Total Heating with Total Control" (THTC) meters. Because of the low customer base, this tariff had not risen much in the past, but the price had now gone up to the maximum that could be charged. He had had conversations with OFGEM on this issue, but it would require more political involvement.

It was questioned what had been used to measure impacts, particularly in relation to closing the attainment gap for children living in poverty.

The Director of Children's Services advised that a number of measures were used, including the "SHANARRI" wellbeing indicators, and an attainment advisor was working closely with the Council in developing the process.

It was commented that people living in Shetland's outer islands faced an even higher cost of living, and this was something the Council would have to look at and prioritise to help promote the islands.

Decision:

The Committee RECOMMENDED that the Policy and Resources Committee approve Shetland's first Annual Child Poverty Action Report for publication.

(Ms Wishart left the meeting)

20/19

Social Work in Scotland Impact Report

The Committee considered a report by the Executive Manager – Criminal Justice/Interim Chief Social Work Officer (CS-20-19-F) presenting the Social Work in Scotland Impact Report.

The Executive Manager – Criminal Justice/Interim Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) summarised the main terms of the report, advising that the Impact Report was not Shetland-specific. It summarised the impact of the 2016 Report and examined progress with the recommendations, and the national picture reflected current progress in Shetland. As the activities underway were held within different Council and Integration Joint Board plans, she would be producing a local improvement plan which pulled together the different strands from across the social work functions and highlighted areas for development locally.

It was noted that there had been problems locally in relation to registration for the workforce, and the Executive Manager – Criminal Justice/Interim CSWO advised that she could report back on these issues. The CSWO from the three island areas met on a regular basis with Social Work Scotland and the Scottish Social Services Council attended these meetings.

It was commented that the number of 65+ year olds receiving home care was down, and questioned if this was reflected locally.

The Executive Manager – Criminal Justice/Interim CSWO referred to work that had been done to build resilience and self-care, so that people were looking after themselves better and only received home care at a later stage in their life. Home care services were provided locally, but there tended to be a reduction in the use of long-term beds and an increase in respite provision.

Decision:

The Committee NOTED the contents of the report.

21/19

Shetland Islands Integrated Children's Plan: Annual Report 2018-19

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services and the Director of Nursing and Acute Services, NHS Shetland (CS-19-19-F) presenting the second Annual Report on the Integrated Children's Plan.

The Director of Children's Services summarised the main terms of the report, advising that the report focused on four key themes. There were good outcomes for children locally, but it was recognised that there were some key social, economic and environmental factors that required to be tackled to help some people overcome issues and barriers. There were two specific projects being promoted to help understand how services and communities could best respond to meet needs, and all agencies were working together to ensure the variety of different work that was going on was reported.

In response to a question regarding the case study from Sound Primary School, she advised that this had been funded by Pupil Equity Funding (PEF), and there would require to be political conversations if the benefits from this project were to be rolled out across Shetland. The funding was available for two years, and Sound School hoped to embed the work carried out within existing resources.

With regard to the Healthy Weight Programme, she advised that this was something that was being monitored and health promotion staff were involved in giving advice. Schools were very much involved in promoting healthy eating messages and providing healthy food.

It was suggested that given that a number of the reports on today's agenda included common themes, consideration could be given to producing one report which pulled all this information together.

The Director of Children's Services advised that there were conversations at a national level around this. There were statutory obligations to report on a number of areas, but it would be good if there could be one reporting mechanism for other areas. She would discuss the matter further with the Integrated Children and Young Peoples Service Planning Group to see if it would be possible to produce something which pulled together an executive summary with the main points from different areas.

It was commented that the report was very positive and that it was heartening that benefits were now being seen from a number of projects relating to early intervention. It was suggested that early intervention was something that the Council should be prioritising, even though the results would only be seen in the longer term.

Decision:

The Committee APPROVED the Shetland Islands Integrated Children's Plan: Annual Report 2018-19 for publication.

22/19

External Audit Reports – Care Inspectorate Reports on Cunningsburgh and Fair Isle Primary School Early Years Services

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services (CS-17-19-F) presenting the Care Inspectorate reports on Cunningsburgh and Fair Isle Primary School Early Years Services.

The Director of Children's Services summarised the main terms of the report, advising that there were no formal recommendations or requirements for improvement at either setting. An ELC team was now working in a central capacity, and the positive impacts of this could now be seen in the Care Inspectorate reports that were coming forward.

It was suggested that it should be relayed to the Care Inspectorate that it was not possible to inspect the quality of care, support and environment without also taking into account the quality of staffing, management and leadership. Therefore it was not appropriate to always state that this had not been assessed.

It was commented that it was commendable that Cunningsburgh had received such a good report given the difficult circumstances at the time due to the ongoing building.

Decision:

The Committee NOTED the content of the reports.

23/19

Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare – Capital Spend Profile Update

The Committee considered a report by the Quality Improvement Officer – ELC (CS-23-19-F) outlining the revised capital programme and spend profile.

The Quality Improvement Officer – ELC outlined the progress to date on the capital works and spend profile, and advised that contingency plans were in place in the event of any unforeseen delays.

Responding to questions, she advised that construction work currently taking place in four settings should be complete by 2 September, and there would be close communication regarding the timeline for the completion of the works.

She went on to confirm that it was correct that children who were not able to access their place due to the building works would not have their childcare costs covered by the Council. This is because when the children return to the setting they will be in receipt of an additional 540 hours before the entitlement comes in to effect in August 2020. Furthermore, it would be unfair to only fund some families as there would not be enough alternative childcare provision in Shetland for the 140 children who would be affected.

It was commented that this was a cost factor that should have been factored into the overall budget that had been rolled out nationally.

It was questioned if any consideration had been given to promoting Sandwich further up the programme, given the impact of the closure of the Central Nursery.

The Quality Improvement Officer – ELC advised that this had been considered and it would be monitored, but it had been decided not to move it up the programme. She went on to confirm that the works in Skeld and Urafirth did not need to take place in order for the expansion to happen, and they would take place at an appropriate time.

In response to a query as to whether there would be internal capacity issues in completing the projects that were scheduled to take place over the summer, the Executive Manager - Assets, Commissioning and Procurement advised that

resources were attached to each of the projects scheduled to take place. He was working closely with the Schools Service and would feed back any issues that arose, and he was satisfied that the budget that had been set aside for the projects still to be developed was adequate.

Decision:

The Committee NOTED the revised Capital programme and spend profile.

24/19

Update on Remote Teaching in Shetland

The Committee considered a report by the Acting Executive Manager – Quality Improvement (CS-22-19-F) outlining the revised capital programme and spend profile.

The Acting Executive Manager – Quality Improvement summarised the main terms of the report, advising that a number of remote teaching pilot projects were taking place, and the progress that had been made in respect of the priorities within the action plan was outlined in the Appendix to the report. It was proposed to create a short-life Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNCT) working group to formalise approaches to remote teaching, and an updated Position Statement and Protocols Paper would be presented to it by the end of the year. The pilot projects had been very positive and although initially sceptical, parents had been happy with the projects when they had been reviewed. There had been a number of challenges and practical difficulties relating to broadband and connectivity that had proved difficult to resolve. He reiterated that there was no agenda in place to replace teachers, but that remote teaching added choice and helped to overcome recruitment challenges.

Responding to questions, he confirmed that young people were given the chance to study two languages and it was hoped that it would be possible to continue Spanish into secondary school as an option. At the moment, it was being taught on a voluntary basis but this would not be sustainable in the long term, and management teams would continue to look into how to resource this as an option.

He also advised there the Western Isles had been very keen to engage with Shetland, and there was potential to use unused class time to deliver teaching to another school in a different area in the future.

In response to a question, the Director of Children's Services advised that the Council was not currently looking to recruit a history teacher to Sandwick School, and there was no funding in the current budget to do so. However there was an opportunity to use remote teaching to enhance the curriculum in situations like these. The Council was not looking to replace teachers with remote learning, but because there was a shortage of teachers nationally, there were benefits and potential for remote learning to pick up some of the spare capacity.

It was commented that it would not be possible to continue to use Change Fund money to support projects, and the Chair said that it would have to be considered as part of the strategy moving forward. Remote teaching provided an opportunity to help sustain rural education alongside classroom teaching, and it would need to be mainstreamed. The Western Isles had been successful in pursuing funding from the general fund, and funding should be mainstreamed to support rural education and sustain the school estate.

Decision:

The Committee NOTED the progress report and appendices on remote teaching in Shetland.

25/19

Closing the Attainment Gap

The Committee considered a report by the Quality Improvement Officer (CS-24-19-F) outlining the revised capital programme and spend profile.

The Acting Executive Manager – Quality Improvement summarised the main terms of the report, and outlined the positive developments that had taken place locally. Not all local schools had received Pupil Equity Funding, and the Council had provided additional funding for these schools to enable them to carry out work to close the attainment gap. The Schools Service was working closely with schools to ensure that they were making the most of the funding available.

It was noted that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills had indicated he would be willing to look at alternative indicators for funding distribution, other than free school meals, and it was questioned if there had been any progress on this.

The Director of Children's Services advised that, as noted earlier in the meeting, the Policy Manager had been carrying out broader work in relation to child poverty and minimum income standards. Work was taking place in relation to designing better measures and mechanisms, and this work should be completed by the end of the year.

The Chair commented that this would be an important piece of work, and Shetland could be doing so much more to close the attainment gap if it had received a bigger share of the resources available.

Decision:

The Committee NOTED the progress being made to Raise Attainment and Close the Poverty Related Attainment Gap in Shetland.

The meeting concluded at 12.25pm.

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Chair