

# MINUTES

## A&B - Public

**Education and Families Committee**  
**Remote Meeting**  
**Monday 31 August 2020 at 10.00am**

### **Present:**

#### Councillors:

P Campbell	S Coutts
J Fraser	A Hawick
C Hughson	E Macdonald
R McGregor	D Sandison
G Smith	T Smith
R Thomson	

#### Religious Representatives:

T Macintyre	H Rankine
M Tregonning	

### **Apologies:**

None

### **In Attendance:**

H Budge, Director – Children’s Services  
J Manson, Executive Manager – Finance  
D Morgan, Interim Chief Social Work Officer  
J Sutherland, Deputy Executive Manager – Children’s Social Work  
A Cogle, Team Leader – Administration  
K Johnston, Team Leader - Legal  
C Anderson, Senior Communications Officer  
R Calder, Executive Manager – Quality Improvement  
J Johnston, Quality Improvement Officer  
C Laing, Solicitor  
L Geddes, Committee Officer

#### Also:

L Anderson & J Dorratt, Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYP)  
A Henderson & G Spence, Head Teachers – Dunrossness Primary School & Whalsay School

### **Chairperson**

Mr G Smith, Chair of the Committee, presided.

### **Circular**

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

The Chair advised that whilst the public were excluded from attendance at the meeting under the terms of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020, members of the local media were in attendance via remote link. The meeting was also being recorded, and would be published online for public access following the meeting.

## **Declarations of Interest**

Mr T Smith declared an interest in Agenda Item 3 “External Audit Reports – Education Scotland Report on Dunrossness Primary School and Nursery Class” due to a close family relative who was a member of staff. He therefore would not take part in any discussion, but would remain in the meeting.

## **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2020 were confirmed on the motion of Mr Sandison, seconded by Mr Campbell.

## **Deputation – Shetland Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs): UK Youth Parliament “Make Your Mark” Ballot**

In response to a question, Mr Thomson, Chair – ZetTrans, advised that he would check to ensure that the MSYPs were being invited to ZetTrans meetings.

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2020 were confirmed on the motion of Mr Campbell, seconded by Mr Fraser.

## **11/20      Children's Services Q1 2020/21 Performance Report**

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children’s Services (CS-14-20-F) outlining the activity and performance of the Children’s Services Directorate for the first quarter of 2020/21.

The Director of Children’s Services summarised the main terms of the report, advising that the level and quantity of work carried out over the period had been impacted by COVID-19. Schools had had to focus on learning from home and two new services – critical childcare for key workers and hubs for ASN and vulnerable young people – had been created. Guidance and procedures around these services had to be created, and there had been close working with other areas of the Council. It had also been necessary to provide digital connectivity to enable learning to continue, and to loan devices to young people who needed them to work from home. In areas where digital connectivity was not as good - for example the North Isles - home learning packs had been prepared and supplied to young people.

She went on to say staff had pulled together to ensure that the experience for young people was as good as it could be, though she was aware that some young people may not have had as good an experience as others. Staff had engaged well with parents, but she was aware that there were some who had not engaged. Children’s Services had tried to capture those that were vulnerable. The Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) team had set up and delivered the critical childcare service for key workers, while also working on preparation for delivering the 1,140 hours of childcare it was committed to. Although the Scottish Government had recently repealed the legislation in relation to the delivery of the 1,140 hours, Children’s Services was in a position to delivery this locally from today for those who wished to take up the offer. It had also been necessary to maintain children’s social work services during the pandemic, and this had necessitated some creative solutions in order to be able to carry out home visits and continue working. Library services had also continued to operate using the e-book system, and the numbers of adults and young people subscribing to this system had doubled over the period.

With regard to the financial position, she advised that there was an underspend in capital, largely due to the COVID-19 impact on the project for children's residential accommodation at Tingwall. This was now up and running again, and should be complete by March 2021. Revenue was also underspent, largely due to vacancies within Children's Social Work and staffing reconfigurations within ELC. It had been possible to carry out some work in relation to the projects listed in Appendix A, although some had not progressed as much as they should have by this stage due to the COVID-19 impact.

She concluded by thanking staff across the Council for the way in which they had worked with Children's Services to enable staff to carry out their work and continue to deliver services over the period.

The Chair advised that he would like to place on record his thanks to the Director of Children's Services, her team, and staff across the Council for the outstanding way they had adapted to the situation and worked flexibly to ensure that high-quality services continued to be delivered to support learning at home, childcare, and children's social work services.

Members of the Committee concurred.

The Director of Children's Services then responded to questions, and the Committee noted the following:

- The blended learning model, which had been prepared earlier in the year, would be utilised if required. Some families had experienced difficulties with the number of people at home requiring to use devices. Families had been asked to be understanding, and there was flexibility with the workforce so that households could do the work required at different times. Live lessons had not been delivered, so school work could be done at a time of choice. The Scottish Government had provided additional funding and Children's Services had been able to provide devices to support learning at home – 360 laptops and 110 iPads had been supplied. The childcare hubs had been important in helping vulnerable children to do some of their work while attending. Where there were connectivity issues, paper learning packs had been supplied.
- Data in relation to closing the attainment gap had been submitted over the last few years, and a report would be presented next cycle with more detailed information. However it had been difficult to gather this information over the last term because children had not been in school.
- Vacancies in Children's Social Work largely related to staffing for the residential accommodation in Tingwall which had been delayed. There had also been some reconfiguration in the Children's Social Work teams, and there were some vacancies. Some of the funding relating to early learning and childcare had been ring-fenced, although restrictions had been relaxed as a result of COVID-19.
- Schools were prepared for any future lockdowns, and were keeping up the usage of Glow in the meantime. Schools were very aware that any further lockdowns would be happening at a different time of year, and there would be an impact on outdoor learning. However the most important thing was to keep children safe, and they should be at home if this was safer.

- Live learning and ways of children engaging with each other if they were not in school was something that was being explored through the e-school project and the regional improvement learning collaborative. Live learning did take place - particularly in the senior phase – and broadening this out to other school phases was being looked at.
- Employability pathways was an area of focus. There had always been a high number of people who had gone on to positive destinations, though there had been a change over the last few months. The number of employers offering apprenticeships had reduced, but there were some government schemes being created in relation to this. There had also been an increase in the number of young people staying on at school. A report on Developing the Young Workforce, including employability pathways, would be presented to the next meeting, and this would include information relating to the most vulnerable.

In response to a question regarding COVID-19 costs and loss of income, the Executive Manager – Finance advised that this was something that would be reported to Policy and Resources Committee and Shetland Islands Council the following week. However he could confirm that an accounting system had been set up to capture COVID-19 related costs, and these were currently in excess of £2 million. £1.4 million of this related to Children's Services – largely due to additional staff-related costs and loss of income.

The Chair noted that the pandemic had highlighted connectivity issues across Shetland, and said that the Council would require to actively work on ensuring that there was equitable distribution of connectivity across Shetland. He went on to say that Shetland College Board had noted that it would not be possible to take up around one-third of the apprenticeships agreed with Skills Development Scotland. Employers were understandably nervous about taking on new apprentices, though the situation with existing apprentices had not been too badly affected by the COVID-19 situation.

It was pointed out that the conclusion of the furlough scheme later in the year may mean that there would be a wider impact on apprentices at that time.

#### **Decision:**

The Committee NOTED the content of the report.

12/20

#### **Children's Services Recovery Report**

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services (CS-18-20-F) presenting information on the Children's Services Recovery Plan.

The Director of Children's Services summarised the main terms of the report, advising that the Recovery Plan had initially been prepared to take account of the blended model of learning, prior to the Scottish Government issuing guidance on 13 July regarding a full-time return. The work which the recovery plan had developed underpinned the reopening of schools and ELC settings, and the safety of children and staff was paramount. Head Teachers had carried out a lot of work to ensure the environment would be right for young people. There had not been much time between the guidance being issued in July and the full-time return of schools in August, but the work that had gone on to prepare for the blended model had assisted in having schools ready in time. Work had gone on across the Council throughout the summer to prepare for a safe return starting on 11 August. The

Scottish Government had also issued new guidance in relation to school transport and also face coverings, and Children's Services had advised parents accordingly about this. The only outstanding matter related to vacant seats on school transport. This was currently being looked at, and parents would be advised how to apply. Children's Services was working closely with NHS Shetland regarding preparations for any potential future outbreaks.

The Chair commented positively on the set of documents that had been prepared to cover all eventualities in the short period of time that staff had been given following the Deputy First Minister's announcement.

The Director of Children's Services and the Executive Manager - Quality Improvement then responded to questions, and the Committee noted the following:

- Children's Services shared concerns about identifying vulnerable families who may be struggling. While there had not been a big increase in the numbers of families applying for free school meals at the beginning of the term, this had seen an increase lately as staff engaged further with families, and adverts in the local media encouraged families to apply. The Anchor Project was working with staff in schools to look at how to support young people in different ways, and consideration was being given to creating an early help team. Counselling in schools would commence shortly, and there were a number of youth work staff in schools. The Emotional Wellbeing and Resilience Project was also working on the child poverty action plan.
- Children's Services had developed good working relationships with Scottish Government officials, and they had been extremely helpful in answering any questions raised and in responding when concerns had been raised about possible school closures in March.
- Head Teachers had been considering where their staff may be vulnerable or shielding. Personal risk assessments had been carried out, and instructions had been clearly set out by health and safety staff. Sessions had been held with Head Teachers to prepare them for school returns, and FAQs had been issued to schools to assist with this. Appendix 2 set out some of the resources that had been developed and were available in relation to safety, health and wellbeing.
- There had been an increase in the number of young people defined as having additional support needs in the short-term, as some families had struggled during lockdown. There had also been an increase in the number of vulnerable young people being supported through the hubs. Children's Services staff had worked together closely to support these young people during lockdown and in their return to school, and attendance rates had improved for some.
- It had been necessary to create an environment for school lunches that complied with social distancing requirements, and the only way to do this safely and meet the criteria was to provide packed lunches. Some schools provided them in classrooms because there was not enough space in dining rooms. There had previously been a good uptake for school lunches, but numbers had dropped severely. Some people were unhappy with the provision, but it was not possible to cater for everyone and - considering the circumstances - it was felt that what was being offered was as good as it could be. After the October break, the circumstances may be different and it may be possible to offer more. Work was

also taking place to see if things could be shifted or spaces created in some schools.

- Work was taking place to develop and broaden the Anchor Project to provide an early help team and to build on work that had already taken place in Sandwick and Brae. A report on the Anchor Project would be presented to the next meeting.
- The e-school project was considering the delivery of more online lessons, something the Scottish Government was keen to develop at a national level. Consideration was also being given to delivering recorded lessons to help deliver the curriculum. The Council had agreed remote learning protocols with local unions, so there was a voluntary option for teachers to engage with live lessons in the event of further school closures and training was available for teaching staff. Live lessons and remote teaching were central to the forward planning.

It was questioned if it would be feasible to have return to work interviews with staff to allow line management to speak openly and honestly with each member of staff, and allow them the opportunity to raise any concerns. Because school staff worked in a unique environment with a large volume of people, this was an added level of complexity. Staff needed to feel that they had been listened to, and it would give Members comfort that any concerns were being alleviated and the unique circumstances of each individual were being taken into account.

The Leader commented that this was a wider corporate issue. What was required of staff in each area was different, and the recovery and renewal framework took this into account. It was critical that staff were looked after, and it was also important to listen to the experience of other areas and learn from them – whether it be public or private sector. The Council had been quite clear about the importance of emotional wellbeing before COVID-19, and this would be of even more importance now.

The Director of Children's Services added that there was an occupational risk assessment tool in place, and that the Chief Executive had written to staff every week to highlight health and wellbeing issues.

It was noted that a lot of representations had been received in respect of vacant seats, so it was important that this work was progressed.

Mr Dorrat, MSYP, thanked staff in Children's Services, Youth Services and schools for their work in helping to ensure a safe return to school for young people. He said that it was encouraging that the Council's Corporate Plan referred to young people having their view heard by the Council, and it was good that the senior management team at the AHS were seeking the views of pupils as to how things could be improved. He referred to the guidance regarding the wearing of face masks in schools, and questioned if it would be possible to reclassify the sixth form study area in the AHS as a classroom.

The Director of Children's Services confirmed that the latest guidance was that face masks should be worn in all social areas, but that she would discuss this further with the school to see if the study area could be classified as a classroom.

Members commented positively on the work that had taken place in a short period to ensure that pupils could return to school full-time safely. It was also commented

that the Anchor Project was a good example of a partnership approach that had made a difference to families, and it was pleasing to hear that the work was going to be broadened. Flexibility was something that was required in island areas to deliver services appropriately.

**Decision:**

The Committee NOTED the Children's Services' Recovery Plan, the Full Time Return of Children and Young People and Staff to Schools Guidance, School Transport Guidance for Parents and Carers, and Responding to an Outbreak of COVID-19 guidance.

13/20

**External Audit Reports: Education Report on Dunrossness Primary School and Nursery Class**

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services (CS-13-20-F) highlighting the findings from the Education Scotland visit to Dunrossness Primary School and Nursery Class.

The Executive Manager – Quality Improvement summarised the main terms of the report, advising that the Head Teacher was also in attendance at today's meeting. He went on to say that the report received had been encouraging and uplifting, and had identified a number of strengths including leadership, teamwork, and positive relationships with the community. There were a couple of areas for improvement that would be progressed, and he paid tribute to the staff for the positive inspection experience.

The Chair added that he was well-acquainted with the school, and he concurred with the strengths that had been highlighted in the report.

**Decision:**

The Committee NOTED the Education Scotland report on Dunrossness Primary School and Nursery Class.

14/20

**External Audit Reports: Education Report on Whalsay Primary School and Nursery Class**

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services (CS-15-20-F) highlighting the findings from the Education Scotland visit to Whalsay School and Nursery Class.

The Quality Improvement Officer summarised the main terms of the report, advising that the Head Teacher was also in attendance at the meeting. The inspection had been a full inspection covering all areas. It had identified a number of strengths including senior leaders' positive influence as role models, high-quality learning and teaching, children who were keen to learn, and close collaboration with partners and the island community. Four areas of improvement had been identified, and the School Management Team were working on making further improvements across the quality indicators, and implementing an action plan to address the identified areas for the nursery.

The Director of Children's Services added that the early learning team were working closely with all settings to ensure that the right processes and procedures were in place for quality assurance.

Mr Thomson, Member for the area, referred to the importance of inspections in flagging up areas for improvement, which would be taken on board. He noted that the report had highlighted the hard work and dedication of the staff in Whalsay School, and expressed his appreciation to staff for the work they had carried out, and were continuing to carry out, in these difficult times.

The Chair added that he was confident staff would be able to turn things around, and demonstrate the ability to act on the areas that had been identified.

**Decision:**

The Committee NOTED the Education Scotland report on Whalsay School and Nursery Class.

15/20

**External Audit Report: Care Inspectorate report on Grodians, Short Breaks for Children, and Windybrae**

The Committee considered a report by the Deputy Executive Manager – Children's Social Work (CS-16-20-F) highlighting the findings from the Care Inspectorate following inspections carried out on Children's Residential Services (Grodians), Short Breaks for Children, and Windybrae.

The Deputy Executive Manager – Children's Social Work summarised the main terms of the report, advising that no areas for improvement had been made in respect of Grodians. One area of improvement had been highlighted in respect of Short Breaks for Children, and actions had been taken to address this. A new procedure had been put in place to deal with the requirement in respect of Windybrae, and an audit of all support plans had taken place in relation to the area for improvement identified.

*(Reverend MacIntyre left the meeting)*

Responding to a question, he advised that he was confident the service had the capacity to carry out care reviews timeously. He went on to advise that inspections were based on a number of evaluations, and the overall inspection grade was based on the lowest common denominator.

**Decision:**

The Committee NOTED the content of the report.

16/20

**Chief Social Work Officer Report 2019/20**

The Committee considered the Annual Report by the Interim Chief Social Work Officer (CS-17-20-F).

The Interim Chief Social Work Officer summarised the main terms of the report and highlighted the activity pertaining to the remit of the Committee. The Committee noted that there continued to be difficulties in recruiting to social work posts, and this was something that continued to be addressed. She went on to say that the majority of services had continued to be delivered during lockdown, and this had required some bespoke packages of care. The impact of lockdown was not yet fully known, but there had been an increase in referrals relating to mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, and crisis care. There would be challenges during the recovery phase in addition to restarting services and catching up in some



areas. She concluded by thanking staff for their hard work and commitment over the period.

**Decision:**

The Committee CONSIDERED and NOTED the Annual Report from the Chief Social Work Officer.

The meeting concluded at 12.05pm.

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Chair