

MINUTES

A&B - Public

Education and Families Committee
Council Chamber, Lower Hillhead, Lerwick
Monday 20 November 2023 at 10.00am

Present:

Councillors:

C Hughson	S Leask
M Lyall	E Macdonald
N Pearson	B Peterson
L Peterson	D Sandison

Present via Remote Link:

J Fraser

Religious Representatives:

J Rollo

Apologies:

T Morton	E Weir
----------	--------

In Attendance:

H Budge, Director – Children’s Services
P Fraser, Executive Manager – Finance
S Flaws, Executive Manager – Education and Learning
L Simpson, Executive Manager - Inclusion
J Sutherland, Executive Manager – Children’s Social Work
K Johnston, Team Leader – Legal
E Perring, Team Leader – Community Planning
M Summers, Team Leader – Youth and Employability Services
D Morgan, Chief Social Work Officer (via remote link)
L Gear, Partnership Officer
J Johnston, Quality Improvement Officer
E Pattison, Management Accountant
L Malcolmson, Committee Officer
L Geddes, Committee Officer

Also:

K Carolan, NHS Shetland
L Tulloch, Voluntary Action Shetland

Chairperson:

Mr Sandison, Chair of the Committee, presided.

The Chair ruled that in accordance with Section 43(2) of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, remote attendance and participation by Committee members during the meeting was permitted. He also advised that the meeting was being recorded and would be published online for public access afterwards.

Circular:

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

Declarations of Interest:

Mr Pearson declared an interest in Agenda Item 6 “Scottish Recommended Allowance – Kinship Care and Foster Care” with regard to a relative who would be affected by this.

Minutes:

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2023 were confirmed on the motion of Mr Pearson, seconded by Mrs Hughson.

23/23 **Chief Social Work Officer Report 2022/23**

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Social Work Officer (CS-31-22-F) presenting her Annual Report for 2022/23.

The Chief Social Work Officer summarised the main terms of the report, outlining work that had taken place over the period and challenges that had been experienced, particularly in relation to recruitment. She concluded by thanking colleagues and partners for the work that had been carried out.

Members commented that the report was welcomed, and thanked those involved in putting it together.

Decision:

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

24/23 **Children’s Services Directorate Performance Report – Quarter 2, 01 July to 30 September 2023**

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children’s Services (CS-28-22-F) summarising the activity and performance of Children’s Services Directorate for the second quarter of 2023/24.

The Director of Children’s Services summarised the main terms of the report, outlining the activity and performance across the Directorate. She advised that there was a change to recommendation 1.2 in the report. The revenue grants referred to required to be reported to the Policy and Resources Committee for approval, so were for noting by the Education and Families Committee.

The Director of Children’s Services and the Executive Manager – Children’s Social Work then responded to questions, and the Committee noted the following:

- Numbers of looked after children very much depended on the nature of the circumstances. The average annual number of looked after children was 32, and episodes in care could be quite short.
- Work was at early stages regarding options for qualifying instructors in schools to teach, particularly in secondary education. All options would be explored. There

were local providers who could assist with getting qualifications required, and there were also distance learning options. People interested in becoming a teacher could approach Skills Development Scotland, UHI Shetland, or Children's Services for information. There were also vacancies across support staff required to run schools, and around 40-50 vacancies at any one time across schools. Some posts were very hard to fill.

- Seasonal illness had an impact on numbers of staff and pupils in school over the winter months. There had been a need to look carefully at staffing in schools as support staff were crucial, and there were no longer as many central staff to support this. Sometimes it had been close to having to shut schools due to lack of staff to cover for illness.
- It had been necessary to decant pupils to another school in the past when there had been a fire in the school, but this had not been done in relation to sickness cover to date.

Members highlighted the positives in the report, and noted the challenges that were being faced. Staff were thanked for their hard work and dedication in continuing to deliver services. It was commented that there was a need to design services according to what could be delivered, rather than continuing to attempt to deliver an older model without resources.

The Chair commented that it was encouraging to see that the budget was not significantly overspent at this point, though it should be noted that the vacancy factor had an impact in terms of the overall spend. The reliance on the good will of staff to back fill and cover posts was recognised. Service reviews were being carried out, but it may not be possible to deliver all savings. However the report was indicative that Children's Services was doing well in terms of meeting its aspirations and targets.

On the motion of Mr Pearson, seconded by Mr Leask, the Committee approved the recommendation in the report, as amended.

Decision:

The Committee CONSIDERED the contents of the report and made relevant comments on progress against priorities to inform further activity, and NOTED the revenue grants which will be reported to the Policy and Resources Committee.

25/23

External Audit Report – Education Scotland Report on Bell's Brae Primary School

The Committee considered a report by the Executive Manager – Education and Learning (CS-26-22-F) presenting recent reports from Education Scotland on Bell's Brae Primary School.

The Executive Manager – Education and Learning summarised the main terms of the report, highlighting the evaluations that had been received following the visit.

The challenges in recruiting a new Head Teacher were noted, and the Director of Children's Services advised that the recruitment process was currently being worked through but that it may be necessary for another process to take place.

In response to questions, the Executive Manager – Education and Learning advised that the quality improvement framework was being reviewed to ensure that it was possible to deliver the highest quality education and learning. Quality Improvement Officers undertook regular support visits and met with Head Teachers to discuss areas of good work, and staffing changes were featuring highly in these conversations. There were also formal School Improvement visits twice a year which focused on key areas, and cyclical termly improvement visits.

She went on to say that the schools found the inspection process challenging as it took place over a short period of time and only a set number of classes were visited, with the evidence gathered used to make these evaluations. The school was confident it was delivering against all areas of the curriculum but acknowledged there was maybe work to be done in terms of how that was delivered in terms of inter-disciplinary or topic work, and had highlighted this in the School Improvement Plan.

Members congratulated staff on achieving a positive report despite the staffing issues that were being experienced.

Decision:

The Committee NOTED the content of the Education Scotland Report on Bell's Brae Primary School.

26/23

External Audit Report - Care Inspectorate Reports on Lerwick Early Learning and Childcare, Scalloway Nursery and Whalsay Nursery

The Committee considered a report by the Executive Manager – Education and Learning (CS-33-22-F) presenting three recent reports from the Care Inspectorate on Lerwick Early Learning and Childcare, Scalloway Nursery and Whalsay Nursery.

The Executive Manager – Education and Learning summarised the main terms of the report, highlighting the evaluations that had been received following the visits. She then responded to questions, and the Committee noted the following:

- As part of the quality improvement framework, officers took part in school visits and ongoing support and professional learning for staff was provided.
- Staff visits to other settings to learn from good practice had not taken place during the pandemic, but were now able to happen. Visits between settings were valuable and there were staff networks and a number of other opportunities for staff to engage and share good practice.
- Each setting was asked to provide an action plan regarding improvement priorities. Officers worked on these priorities and provided an additional level of support to those settings which required it. Because inspections were unannounced, inspectors could only evaluate what they saw on the day and staffing changes could have an impact on this. Feedback from inspections was taken on board and changes were made. There was a lot of team work involved in action plans to make sure that the service was delivered and continued to develop.
- As part of evaluation frameworks, practice in settings was self-evaluated on a regular basis. Part of this involved asking for views from stakeholders, so the

views parents, staff and the wider community were used to evaluate this information.

It was commented that even though there were some areas where improvements required to be made, it was important to recognise that staff continued to provide a very good service.

Decision:

The Committee NOTED the content of the Care Inspectorate Reports on Lerwick Early Learning and Childcare, Scalloway Nursery and Whalsay Nursery.

27/23

National Improvement Framework Annual Report and Plan: The Ambition - Excellence and Equity for Shetland's Learners

The Committee considered a report by the Quality Improvement Officer (CS-23-22-F) presenting the National Improvement Framework Annual Report and Plan.

The Quality Improvement Officer summarised the main terms of the report, outlining performance against the national priorities and in relation to closing the attainment gap. He concluded by highlighting the significant changes and reform nationally which would have an impact locally, and the recruitment challenges which continued to place pressure on schools. It was also difficult to demonstrate the progress that was being made in closing the poverty-related attainment gap as the national definition did not apply well locally.

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

- All local authorities were facing recruitment challenges, and there were not enough people undertaking teaching training programmes to fill the gaps. Shetland tended to be at the end of the line regarding teacher choices, as students tended to stay closer to home.
- The data relating to literacy between primary and secondary settings was interesting, as there was a significant jump in Secondary 3 statistics which then translated into national qualifications. This indicated over-caution in terms of the level awarded in primary settings, so work would take place with Head Teachers around this. There would be a focus on learning, teaching, and assessment to improve confidence. The literacy and numeracy curriculum was central to all practice, and there were real opportunities for inter-disciplinary learning where literacy featured quite heavily. There was a need to consider these key aspects of the curriculum and other demands on teacher time that took them away from this.
- There was a strong relationship with Shetland UHI and a co-ordinated approach in broadening the curriculum and giving access to vocational opportunities. Young people were accessing vocational pathway courses and academic and apprenticeship programmes, and discussions were ongoing regarding 2024/5. There was a need to look to see what would happen next with Shetland UHI and support them in recognition of the importance of the partnership.
- The partnership with Shetland UHI was also important in ensuring sustainability of employment, and events were held to make young people aware of

employment opportunities locally. However it was the case that even if all 200 plus school leavers stayed in Shetland, there were not enough people to fill all the jobs that were available, and this was a broader issue for the Shetland Partnership.

The importance of the Annual Report and Plan was referred to in evaluating performance, and concern was expressed regarding the financial situation of Shetland UHI and how this may impact on the ability to achieve aims. Staff were thanked for gathering the information required to complete the report.

On the motion of Mr Sandison, seconded by Mr Leask, the Committee approved the recommendation in the report.

Decision:

The Committee APPROVED the Shetland Islands Council's National Improvement Framework Annual Report and Plan at Appendix 1.

(The Committee adjourned at 11.25am and reconvened at 11.35am)

(Mr Pearson left the meeting)

28/23 **Scottish Recommended Allowance – Kinship Care and Foster Care**

The Committee considered a report by the Executive Manager - Children's Social Work (CS-34-22-F) regarding the Scottish Recommended Allowance for kinship and foster carers.

The Executive Manager - Children's Social Work summarised the main terms of the report, outlining the proposed changes in line with the Scottish Recommended Allowance and advising that the Scottish Government had allocated funding to offset the costs of implementation.

On the motion of Mrs Lyall, seconded by Ms Macdonald, the Committee approved the recommendation in the report.

Decision:

The Committee RECOMMENDED that the Policy and Resources Committee RECOMMENDS that the Council RESOLVES to:

- APPROVE the implementation of the Scottish Recommended Allowance for kinship and foster carers, as set out at Section 4.6 and 4.7 of the report
- NOTE that future Fostering and Kinship Allowance rates will be agreed via the Council's budget setting process

(Mr Pearson returned to the meeting)

29/23 **Shetland Children's Partnership Plan 2023-2026**

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services and Director of Nursing and Acute Services (CS-30-22-F) presenting Shetland Children's Partnership Plan 2023-2026.

The Director of Children's Services summarised the main terms of the report, and thanked those involved in preparing it.

(Mr Fraser left the meeting during the following discussion)

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

- "LIAM" was a regulated intervention to be delivered by universal services. It was a new approach that could be delivered in small groups or one-to-one sessions.
- A number of the reports presented at today's meeting had overlapping themes, and the reporting mechanism could feel onerous as they required to be reported separately. Staff responsible for putting the reports together were good at using the same information and reference materials across agencies because they tended to sit on the same groups. There had been conversations with the Scottish Government around including the child poverty report in the Shetland Children's Partnership Plan, but there were many broader aspects which sat within the remit of the Shetland Partnership and the Scottish Government wanted to see it reported separately. It was also necessary to report on the National Improvement Framework. There was room for improvement around being smarter in condensing and consolidating the information available.
- It was recognised that the Plan was fluid, and there were regular meetings to look at different aspects of the Plan and to monitor it.

It was commented that the Plan was now much easier to read and that it demonstrated the work done in partnership across all agencies to achieve the best for children and the community.

It was suggested that pressure should be put on the Scottish Government to streamline reporting processes in order to reduce the resources required to prepare similar reports.

On the motion of Mr Leask, seconded by Mr Sandison, the Committee approved the recommendation in the report.

Decision:

The Committee commented on the priorities considered appropriate for the delivery of services to children in Shetland and APPROVED the Shetland Children's Partnership Plan 2023-26 for publication.

30/23

Shetland Public Protection Committee Annual Report 2022/23

The Committee considered a report by the Independent Convener and Lead Officer - Shetland Public Protection Committee (CS-29-22-F) presenting the Shetland Public Protection Committee Annual Report 2022-2023.

The Executive Manager – Children's Social Work summarised the main terms of the report, advising that the remit of the Committee related to both child and adult protection.

Ms Macdonald requested that thanks to Kate Gabb for the work and leadership she had undertaken in her role be recorded.

On the motion of Mr Leask, seconded by Mr Peterson, the Committee approved the recommendation in the report.

Decision:

The Committee NOTED the Shetland Public Protection Committee Annual Report 2022-2023.

31/23

Annual Local Child Poverty Action Report

The Committee considered a report by the Executive Manager - Inclusion and Team Leader - Community Planning (CS-32-22-F) presenting Shetland's fifth Annual Local Child Poverty Action Report (LCPAR).

The Executive Manager – Inclusion summarised the main terms of the report, advising that child poverty was very much a prime consideration of Children's Services and the wider range of partners and organisations, given that the higher cost of living was a key factor relating to child poverty in Shetland.

(Mrs Lyall left the meeting during the following discussion)

The Executive Manager – Inclusion, the Executive Manager – Education and Learning, and the Team Leader – Community Planning then responded to questions, and the Committee noted the following:

- National figures relating to poverty were only updated at certain times of the year, usually March. The report had not been produced earlier in order that it could be presented at the same time as other similar reports, so the information was slightly out of date.
- The Council had been successful in securing funding from the Scottish Government for improving childcare for families in poverty or at risk, and pilot projects would be taking place with partners in two communities to look at improving access to childcare.
- It was everyone's responsibility to help reduce the stigma associated with poverty, and it was important to make sure that everyone had the relevant information.
- The final draft of the research that had taken place on the Anchor Project was almost complete, and this information would be published and shared soon.
- The number of childminders available was now down to single figures. Work had taken place to focus on recruitment in particular areas of need, but this had been unsuccessful. The funding that had been received from the Scottish Government would also include recruitment of childminders.
- There had been a reduction in the percentage of children in low income families in 2020-21, and it was assumed that this was related to the uplift in Universal Credit at this time. It had then stabilised again when Universal Credit changed.

Members thanked those involved in the production of the report, and highlighted the importance of ending child poverty locally.

Decision:

The Committee RECOMMENDED that Policy and Resources Committee APPROVE Shetland's fifth Annual Local Child Poverty Action Report for publication.

The meeting concluded at 12.30pm.

.....
Chair