

## 2025/26 Briefing Note Template

**Elected Member Briefing – Children’s Services Case Studies – Quarter 4 2025/26**

**Elected Member Briefing Note Ref. No. 2026-28**

### **Briefing Note**

Briefing by: Samantha Flaws, Director of Education and Children’s Services

Date: 11 June 2026

Subject: Children’s Services Case Studies

<b>Public</b>
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### **Purpose**

This briefing note intends to provide Members with additional insight into some of the current work of the Children’s Services Directorate. This aligns with the timescales around the Children’s Services Directorate Performance Report for Quarter 4 that will be presented at Education and Families Committee on 15 June 2026 for noting.

### **Background**

Case studies have previously been included within the Children’s Services Directorate Quarterly Performance Reports. However, it is essential that these reports retain a clear and consistent focus on key performance indicators (KPIs), enabling Members to assess how effectively the Directorate is performing against its agreed priorities.

At the same time, it is recognised that the work of the Directorate extends beyond KPI reporting and the routine delivery of services. There is value in ensuring that Members remain informed about the broader range of activity being undertaken across Children’s Services, while maintaining an appropriately strategic focus.

Accordingly, this Members’ Briefing has been prepared separately, with accompanying case studies to provide insight into the wider work of the Directorate and to illustrate the impact of staff efforts in practice, without detracting from the primary performance focus of the quarterly reports.

## **Key points**

The attached case studies include:

- Care Fun Afternoon: Feb 2026
- Adult Learning – Spotlight on Digital Skills
- School Counselling Service
- Free Breakfasts for Secondary School Pupils
- National Improving Writing Programme
- Multi-Agency Bairns' Hoose Event
- Early-Positive Approaches to Support
- Learning to Read in the Early Years Professional Learning Programme
- Care Day Friday 20 February 2026: 'Making a Meid'
- The NEurodivergent peer Support Toolkit (NEST) AHS Pilot Group
- Early Adopting Communities Activities

## **Overview**

This briefing provides Members with a selection of case studies that highlight the breadth and impact of work undertaken across Children's Services. While the Directorate's Quarterly Performance Report remains focused on key performance indicators (KPIs) and overall performance, these examples offer additional strategic insight into how services are delivered in practice. Collectively, they demonstrate the diverse ways in which staff support and engage with children, young people, and families, and the positive outcomes being achieved across the Directorate.

Last modified on: *11 June 2026*

## **Contact Details:**

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**Please return this form to [memberssupport@shetland.gov.uk](mailto:memberssupport@shetland.gov.uk) to be logged and circulated to all Councillors.**

END

# Care Fun Afternoon: Feb 2026

★ West Mainland Leisure Centre ★  
Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2026

Get ready for an afternoon packed with fun!  
Activities include: Bouncy Castle, Soft Play, Badminton battles, pickle ball challenges, climbing wall, pool inflatable\*, arts and crafts  
There will be an opportunity for older young people to use the Gym\*\* and also Health Suite (age 14+)

\*If you wish to swim please remember Under 8's need to be accompanied by an adult in the pool. Remember your swimming costume and towel. please get in touch with us via email below if you need swimming gear\*  
\*\* Gym users must have appropriate Gym Inductions, if they don't they cannot enter the Gym\*\*

## Timetable for the day

please note on the day these times may change:

- Bouncy Castle: 2:00-3:00pm
- Main Hall Activities: 2:00-4:00pm
- Pool Inflatable: 3:00pm-3:50pm
- Climbing Wall: 2:00-4:00pm
- Community Room: 1:45-4:00pm
- Health Suite & Gym (2:00pm-3:45pm)

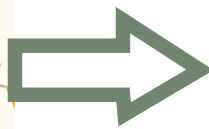
This event is free to attend!

To book places please contact:

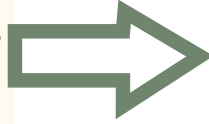
Hayley Davis: 01595 744429 or Angela Leask 01595 744406

FosteringandAdoptionTeam@shetland.gov.uk

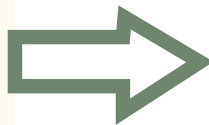
★ This event is delivered in collaboration with #ShetlandCrew, the Foster and Adoption Team, Sport & Leisure Services, and Community Neighbourhood Support. We would also like to thank Tesco's Community Champion for generously providing refreshments.



Invitation sent out to care experienced young people and families across Shetland



Total of 42 people came across the door



New sports tried: Carpet Bowls and Pickle Ball. Climbing Wall, Swimming Pool and Bouncy Castle were busy too all afternoon

## Feedback

*Climbing Wall: I really wanted to try it but i was so scared, the staff were so nice and helped me. I reached the top! can't believe it*  
Young Person

*Manic but brilliant!  
No time to think  
Just go an try!*  
Parent

*Great afternoon!  
Lots of super activities  
Bairns will sleep tonight*  
Parent

*Lovely afternoon, seeing families connected and seeing them take on all the different activities. One family went onto sign up for family membership!*  
Staff Member

*It was super having Kit for All there. Lots of parents and bairns commented on how good the selection was. Happy bairns heading home with some new items of clothing and trainers*  
Staff Member

## Points to take forward:

*add an extra hour to the community room for ending*

*Include a quiet area*

*nice to have a social evening like bingo and games for families and young ones to attend*

# Shetland Care Experienced Fun Days

## Background

The Shetland Fun Days were born out of a simple but powerful idea: to create spaces where care experienced children and young people, along with their families and carers, could feel included, supported and celebrated. Initially launched as the grand finale of the first Festival of Care in 2019.

## Who is involved

The driving force behind these Fun Days is a collaboration between SIC Foster and Adoption Team, #ShetlandCrew, SIC Sport & Leisure Services, Who Cares? Scotland, and SIC Community Neighbourhood team, Children Residential and Through Care and After Care

## Main Objectives:

- Build a strong sense of belonging among care experienced children, young people, and their families and carers.
- Create opportunities for enjoyment, helping participants explore new interests and potentially new hobbies.
- Promote wellbeing through shared, positive experiences, strengthening trust and relationships between young people and their support workers.
- Connection for adoptive families, foster families, kinship carers, and young people in residential or continuing care.

## Commitment

Currently we host 4 events a year, one per term. Each designed to celebrate connection and provide meaningful experiences within our community.

## Linking to The Promise

All these initiatives align with 'The Promise', ensuring that care experienced children and young people grow up loved, safe, and respected. By creating spaces for joy, connection, and cultural engagement, we contribute to fulfilling the vision of The Promise within our local community.

# SIC Adult Learning Spotlight on Digital Skills



Digital confidence and skills are now essential in all areas of life and work

## OUR AIM

To support adults to develop the skills and confidence needed to use digital technology in everyday life. This includes helping learners to carry out essential tasks such as applying for jobs, accessing health services and information, managing finances, shopping online, and staying connected through digital communication platforms. We work with adults at all starting points, providing inclusive support that enables individuals to progress towards their digital skills goals at their own pace.

## OUR OFFER



- One to one support tailored to a learner's starting point and goals
- Weekly Lunchtime Learning drop-ins at the Shetland Library in Lerwick – Mondays 10am to 12noon
- Digital drop-ins across Shetland – rolling programme - dates advertised regularly on the Shetland Community Hub Facebook page and via our website **LearnShetland**
- Daytime and evening classes throughout the year
- Resources to download and use at home, via our website

## OUR SUPPORT COVERS



### Everyday Digital Skills

- Getting up and running with your digital device - phone, tablet or PC
- Keeping in touch with family and friends
- Making video calls
- Using social media
- Setting up an email account
- Emails and attachments
- Creating and saving documents
- Software updates and system management



### Work & Skills

- Job search skills and preparing job applications
- Creating a CV
- Spreadsheet basics
- Word processing basics



### Safety

- Staying safe online
- Shopping safely online
- Internet banking
- Managing online transactions

## DELIVERING ON

Shetland CLD Plan 2024 - 2027

Priority 1: Participation

Action 1.1

Maximise access to digital skills learning across Shetland, particularly for those most disadvantaged.

## OUR DIGITAL STATS FOR 2025/2026



**432** adults were supported to develop their digital skills and confidence



**100** Digital Skills Pop-Ins were delivered across Shetland



**301** adults attended our Digital Pop-ins



**14** community venues, from Unst to Sandwick, were used to deliver Digital Pop-Ins

## OUR LEARNERS SAID

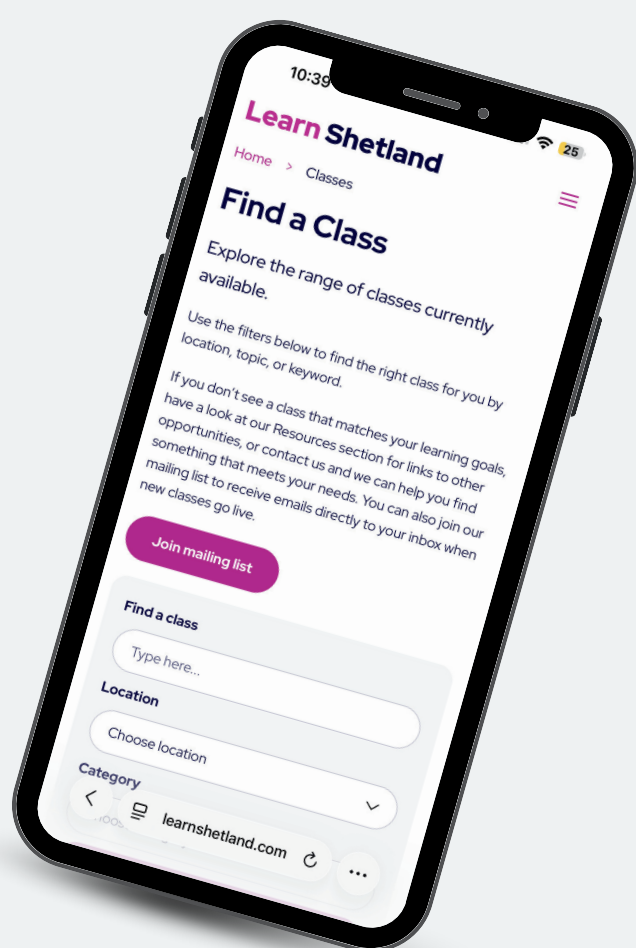
*"I hadn't set up a bank account in years and thought it was something that you could still do on the street. I went along to the Library and met Adult Learning, and the lass said yes, they could easy help me. I said that it would likely be a challenge at my age, but they helped me and explained everything. With their help I got the bank account opened. I can do banking online for the first time in my life and I'm making better use of my mobile phone for other things too."*

*"I'm so grateful for the help I got from Adult Learning. They helped me at a difficult time in my life. I feel more able to do things on the laptop now and I know I can always go back for help if I get stuck. I feel brighter in myself too, which is good."*

*"I had written myself off until I realised I have skills, I just needed to apply them differently. My new digital skills have made such a change in my world."*

*"Adult Learning were so patient and supportive. I had lost any confidence I once had using a computer. I couldn't have got this job without their support. I now have a job that suits my family life and will be more financially stable before long."*

## NEW WEBSITE LAUNCHED



Adult Learning launched a new website, **LearnShetland**, in February. This provides a more accessible and user-friendly platform to support adults at every stage of their learning journey. The site has been designed to support adults who may be returning to learning, or looking to explore new interests, or develop skills for employment and everyday life. The new platform introduces improved functionality, including the ability for learners to book and pay for classes online in a single, streamlined process.

Scan the QR code to look for yourself and learn more about Adult Learning classes and the support we offer.



[www.learnshetland.com](http://www.learnshetland.com)



01595 743888



[classes@shetland.gov.uk](mailto:classes@shetland.gov.uk)



Shetland Islands Council

# School Counselling Service

April 2025 - March 2026

## OUR APPROACH

Relationship Based, Children's Rights Aware, Trauma Informed

Person-Centred Counselling and Psychotherapy delivered from an evidence base by qualified, professionally registered Counsellors. The offer of core therapeutic conditions within a safe, supportive, regular, boundaried and confidential space.

*Active listening. Warmth. Empathic reflection. Validation. Genuineness. Acceptance. Respect without Judgement. Unconditional Positive Regard. Curiosity. Kindness. Understanding. Secure and Trusting Working Together Relationship. Flexible. Creative. Working at clients pace and with clients' agenda.*

*"Trusting in the innate human capacity to be the best version of self"*

## Access and Demographics

Children and Young People who access the School Counselling Service are aged 10 to 18 years, from primary and secondary schools across Shetland. Counselling sessions take place in school or from an alternative base and can be face to face or online. The School Counselling Service operates during term time and school holiday periods.

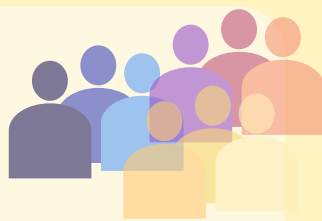
### 68 children/young people engaged in Counselling

60% identified as female, 40% male

With peaks in pupils engaging in Counselling in P7, S2 and S3.

47% were identified as having Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

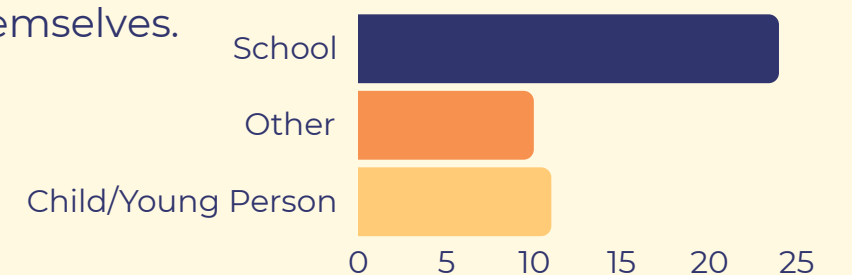
99% met with their Counsellor face to face



### 45 Requests for Counselling

Requests for Counselling are normally received from pupil support/head teachers in schools but can be from parents/carers or the child/young person themselves.

The majority of these requests were initiated by the school.



### Most Commonly presented issues

*familial difficulties self-esteem and worth school stress mood management anxiety low self-confidence*  
*low mood bullying change and loss stress and worry school attendance incongruence and understanding of self*  
*relationship difficulties trauma overwhelm anger sleep difficulties focus and concentration difficulties isolation*

## Active Waiting List Management

All children and young people were actively managed whilst waiting for their Counselling to begin and knew that the School Counselling Service was being mindful of them:

- Involvement throughout entire process and frequent communication after allocation.
- Close partnership working with the team around each child or young person.
- Regular School Counselling Panel meetings ensuring sensitive coordination of input (School Counsellors, Educational Psychologist, Quality Improvement Officer (Inclusion) and from NHS Shetland: CAMHS and School Nursing Service)
- Invitation (within 6 weeks of allocation) to engage with the Well-Being Offer / Well-Being check-ins.

**29 children and young people engaged in our Well-Being Offer**  
**22 School Counselling Panel meetings held**



100% experienced the Well-Being Offer as helpful or supportive. After taking part in the Well-Being Offer, children and young people reported:

59% positive shift rating their **understanding of their overall Well-Being** from Very Poor/Average to Good/Excellent.

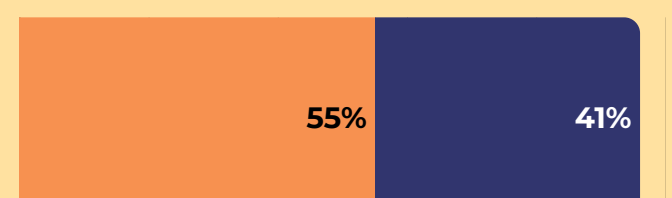
54% positive shift rating their **understanding of Support and Resilience** from Very Poor/Average to Good/Excellent.

40% positive shift rating their **understanding of Self-Care** from Very Poor/Average to Good/Excellent.

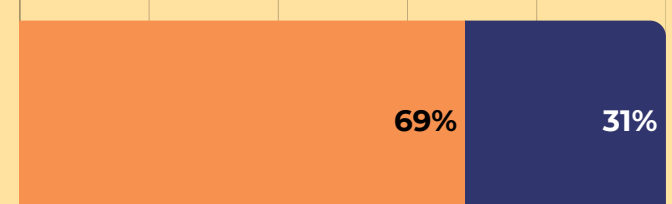
38% positive shift rating their **ability to look after their own Well-Being** from Very Poor/Average to Good/Excellent.

● Slightly - Yes a bit  
● Yes a lot - Yes hugely

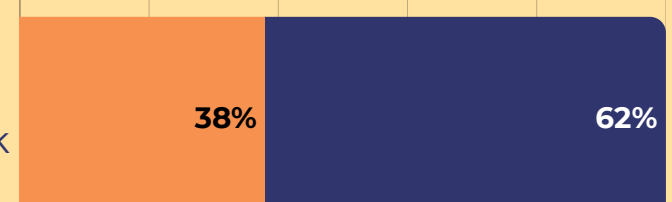
Improved or deepened their understanding of: Being Human / Neuroscience



Improved or deepened their understanding of: Your 'Self' (mind and body)



Improved or deepened their understanding of: Self-care and how to look after your Well-Being

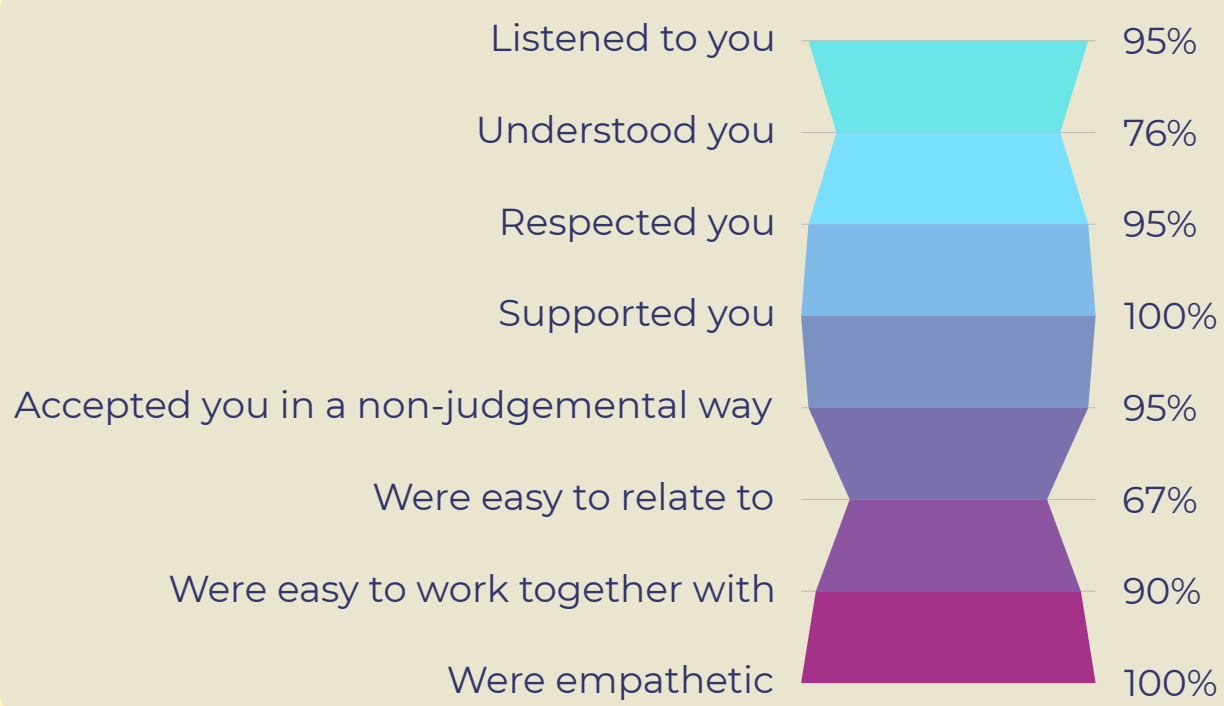




## Therapeutic Alliance and Quality of Counselling Space/Delivery

When children and young people feel ownership of their Counselling, validated, heard and understood in a neutral space, the impact of their Counselling is more profound and/or lasting.

When they feel comfortable and safely held in their Counselling, they are more able to work at depth, and their therapy outcomes are more meaningful.



### What children and young people found helpful in their Counselling



Children and young people completed an End of Episode Survey and reported:

- 87% valued the mindful and sensitive approach of the School Counselling Service
- 73% said it was easy to access the School Counselling Service
- 100% felt very / extremely supported by the School Counselling Service
- 85% said that they School Counselling Service responded well to their needs
- 71% felt involved, informed and empowered during their engagement with the School Counselling Service

## Counselling Impact

### Frequently reported positive changes as a result of Counselling:

- understand myself
- be myself
- able to reflect
- self-awareness (thoughts, feelings, behaviours)
- ability to express myself
- ability to make informed choices
- feeling less overwhelmed
- more confidence (within self)
- able to cope
- congruence
- validation
- autonomy
- self regulation



100% of children and young people found Counselling helpful or supportive. Counselling helped:

- Clients ability to cope
- Clients ability to notice what they might need
- Clients Self-Compassion
- Clients Self-Awareness

Counselling improved or deepened the Clients understanding of their:

- Self
- Relationships
- Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being
- Physical Well-Being



### Feedback from Children and Young People

- "I feel noticed. I understand myself better. I feel freer. I like myself now that I can be myself"
- "I was able to talk about whatever I wanted to and get strategies to help me deal with things in my life."
- "I am much brighter and I look forward to things and feel happier."
- "I feel more connected to the world and less lonely."
- "I have less stress and I am more aware of making choices for myself because I am able to notice what is important and what I like and want to do."

## Working with wider school communities and looking ahead

The School Counselling Service ensures that service development and improvement is responsive to Shetlands unique context and to the needs of our children and young people.

- Proactive collaboration with children and young people; their voices, insights and experiences
- Continuous gathering of stakeholder feedback
- Reflective practice and thematic analysis to inform continuous professional development
- Alignment with the Scottish Children's Commissioner's Recommendations for School Counselling

The School Counselling Service is committed to modelling Relationship Based Practice and passionate about facilitating meaningful change: **Ethos: a consistently warm and friendly approach to everyone.**

- High quality, safe and effective delivery of Service by School Counsellors
- Tackle taboo by embedding Counselling in schools and being familiar and approachable faces
- Create opportunities to deepen understandings around mental health and emotional well-being and of a holistic approach to responding to our children and young people's needs
- Support schools in their priorities around mental health and emotional wellbeing, including attendance at school partnership meetings and parent/carer engagement events
- Input into relevant local strategic conversations and keeping links fresh with national work and updates in School Based Counselling.

## Free Breakfasts for Secondary School Pupils: Case Study

### Overview

During the winter of 2025/26, Shetland Islands Council delivered a free breakfast provision across secondary schools using funding from the Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund. The breakfast offer built on a successful pilot and was designed as a universal provision, ensuring that all pupils could access breakfast without stigma. The breakfasts were delivered by the Council's Catering and Cleaning Team and made available during the school day in a calm, supervised setting.

### Why this work was needed

Rising living costs, compounded by Shetland's geography, higher fuel costs and winter weather, put additional pressure on families. Schools reported that some pupils were arriving at school hungry, particularly during winter months when weather can restrict outdoor activity and increase time spent indoors. A universal breakfast provision ensured that pupils who needed food could access it discreetly and families did not face additional morning costs. Schools were able to support wellbeing without means-testing.

### What was delivered

Over 13,000 breakfasts were served across secondary schools between October 2025 and March 2026. Breakfasts were available to all pupils each school day both before school and during morning break. Provision was integrated into the school routine and supported by school staff

### Impact and outcomes

Feedback from schools highlighted several key benefits:

- Improved readiness to learn pupils started the day nourished which supported concentration, learning and behaviour.
- Calmer school environment particularly during periods of poor weather, the breakfast service helped create a settled social space at the start of the day.
- Financial relief for families, schools reported a reduction in tuck shop spending, easing pressure on parents' finances.
- Reduced stigma: Universal provision ensured access without pupils feeling singled out.

### Wider benefits

The breakfast provision demonstrated how universal food offers in schools can support child wellbeing and attainment, contribute to reducing financial pressure on households, provide a practical, inclusive response to cost-of-living challenges

The initiative complements wider Council efforts to address child poverty and supports the aims of the Good Food Nation approach by ensuring children have reliable access to nutritious food in a dignified way.

#### Key learning

Consistency and universality were critical to the success of the breakfast programme. Embedding food provision into the normal school routine helped maximise uptake, reduce stigma, and deliver clear wellbeing and educational benefits during the winter months.

# National Improving Writing Programme - Cohort 5

## August 2025 - March 2026



Children and  
Young People  
Improvement  
Collaborative



Education  
Scotland  
Foghlam Alba

### Overview

Since November 2022, Shetland has participated in CYPIC's Improving Writing Programme. The programme uses structured improvement cycles to strengthen teaching and raise attainment in writing. It supports professional learning, improving consistency and confidence among staff. National evidence shows positive impact on pupils' attainment, engagement and confidence. This session, Shetland has rolled the programme out to Cohort 5, supporting improvement across schools.

### Involvement in Cohort 5

- 4 x local leads
- 7 x primary teachers
- 5 x primary probationer teachers
- 1 x primary head teacher

### Stretch Aims



By June 2026, at least 80% of Cohort 5 children will be on track for their age and stage within CfE writing outcomes. (Baseline 76% - August 2025)

By June 2026, at least 80% of P4 children in Cohort 5 will have successfully achieved CfE First Level writing. (Baseline 75% - August 2025)

By June 2026, at least 75% of P7 children in Cohort 5 will have successfully achieved CfE Second Level writing. (Baseline 70% - August 2025)

**A data uplift in March 2026 suggests that the stretch aims are likely to be met.**

### Focus

Improving writing attainment by developing high-quality teaching, learning and assessment approaches.

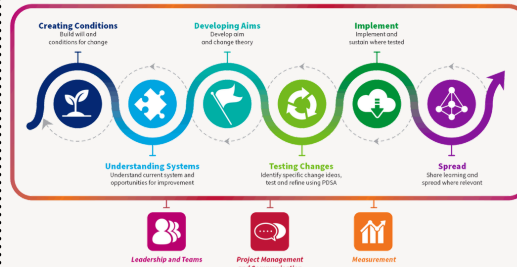
### Connection

Accelerating improvements by connecting teachers across schools and linking them with a range of multi-agency professionals.

### Method

The programme uses the systematic approach of the Quality Improvement Journey to bring method to change programmes.

Quality Improvement Journey



### Process Measure Data

Pre and post programme, the percentage of Cohort 5:

- Pupils who enjoy writing a great deal or a lot rose from 35% to 87%.
- Teachers who were extremely or very confident to teach writing rose from 35% to 94%.
- Teachers who enjoy teaching writing a great deal or a lot rose from 60% to 100%.
- Teachers who were extremely or very confident to assess writing rose from 30% to 86%.



### Surprises

**Comments from cohort 5 participants when asked "what surprised you about the programme?"**

- "How much it has impacted child engagement, confidence and enjoyment in writing."
- "The progress my pupils have had so far - particularly those with learning needs."
- the enthusiasm of some of those more reluctant writers to achieve the targets and to write."
- "Individual pupils who would avoid any literacy based tasks now actively engage and enjoy."
- "How the bairns confidence has grown in their writing and how engaged and how much they are still enjoying writing."

**[Click here to watch a video a local probationer teacher produced and showcased at the programmes sharing learning session.](#)**

### Challenges

**Comments from cohort 5 participants when asked "what are the pebbles in your shoe?"**

- "Lack of classroom support during writing lessons."
- "Time to target all the pupils in my class who need support to meet targets consistently."
- "Concerns that I am not challenging the more able writers in the class."
- "Having time to provide effective feedback."

### Probationer Feedback

"I found NIWP to be extremely helpful during my probationary year, and I am very grateful to have been part of cohort 5."

"It was clear to see the engagement of my pupils throughout the programme, and I could also see real improvement in their writing. I found it to be a very effective way to track their progress over time which was really valuable."

"As a probationer, it was really helpful to have a clear structure and programme to follow for teaching writing in class, especially at a stage in the year when there are so many other things to learn and manage. Having that support gave me more confidence in approaching writing lessons and helped make the process feel more manageable."

### Next Steps

- Invite some secondary teachers to join the national implementation wave of the programme.
- Consider if there are enough teachers in the system who have not yet completed the programme to run a Cohort 6 in session 2026-2027.
- Quality assure the writing programme is being delivered in primary classes.
- Explore delivering a professional learning programme that uses the Quality Improvement Journey to target other curricular areas.

## Multi-Agency Bairns' Hoose Event – Highlight Report

Prepared for: Education & Families Committee | Prepared by: Hannah Polson, Bairns' Hoose Project Manager  
June 2026

### Overview

As one of the most remote local authorities, Shetland delivered the first multi-agency Bairns' Hoose learning event in Scotland led by a local partnership, bringing together 20 national experts and around 80 local participants in person. Held over two days in February 2026, the event enabled partners to develop a shared vision for Bairns' Hoose in Shetland. Funded by the Scottish Government Bairns' Hoose Development Fund, it represents a significant achievement in building national connections and progressing local implementation.

### Purpose

The event aimed to build a shared understanding of the Bairns' Hoose model, while exploring how a trauma-informed, child-centred approach can be delivered in Shetland. It also aimed to strengthen understanding of the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM), support learning from rural and island pathfinder areas, and gathered multi-agency insight to inform local implementation.

### What We Did

The programme brought together national and local expertise, including the Scottish Government Bairns' Hoose Unit, Children First, the National Joint Investigative Interview Team, Social Work Scotland, and partners from Highland and the Western Isles. This created space for shared learning, discussion, and early development of a collective vision for Shetland, grounded in both national guidance and local context.

### Key Learning

Key learning from the event highlighted the importance of developing a shared multi-agency vision, improving joined-up support for children and families, and creating a safe, trauma-informed physical environment. Participants also identified the need for clearer communication and justice pathways, a better understanding of roles across services, and a strong emphasis on participation and children's voices. Ensuring the model reflects Shetland's unique island context was a consistent theme throughout.



### Lessons Learned and Impact

While presentations were valuable, a greater balance towards facilitated discussion would have supported more engagement and shared understanding. There is also a need to focus more explicitly on translating national policy into practical, locally relevant delivery. Continued engagement will be essential to maintaining momentum and shared ownership across partners.

Feedback suggests the event strengthened relationships across partner agencies and improved shared understanding of Bairns' Hoose locally. Feedback from other areas highlighted that this approach would have supported them to establish a shared understanding at the outset of their own implementation journey.

### Next Steps

The learning from this event is informing the next phase of implementation in Shetland. Further multi-agency engagement is planned, alongside a follow-up event to review progress and ensure developments reflect local needs.



## Early-Positive Approaches to Support (E-PATs)

The Pre-School Home Visiting Service (PSHVS) has facilitated the E-PATs Programme in collaboration with a trained parent facilitator annually since 2021. This year, eight parents from across Shetland participated.

### Why E-PATs?

Lived experience and research has highlighted many things that can be helpful when raising a child with additional support needs, but that often this information is **not made available to those who need and could use it most, when they need it.**

Families of children with additional support needs sometimes need some **extra support to navigate through challenges** that relate to their child's particular needs.



### What is E-Pats?

E-PATs is an 8-week family support programme for caregivers of children aged five and under who are thought to have 'additional developmental needs' (e.g. global developmental delay, autism).

The programme was co-produced by the Tizard Centre (University of Kent) and parents with lived experience and is always facilitated by a professional and parent facilitator trained in the programme.

The programme provides **high quality, evidence-based information and strategies** specific to the needs of families raising a child with 'additional developmental needs'

AND

provides **emotional and social support** and attends closely to caregivers' **emotional needs.**

### What does it involve?

The programme involves eight weekly sessions each lasting 2.5 hours. The sessions are relaxed and welcoming and involve a combination of listening as facilitators share the programme content and discussion activities.

Tea, coffee and snacks are provided. A crèche is also provided.

### What impact did the programme have?

Feedback was extremely positive with all parents reporting a highly positive impact:

*"I took away useful and fresh information from each sessions, applicable to both my neurodiverse and neurotypical children. Information and advice I was able to apply immediately /easily and see an improvement for all."*

*"Real life and relatable experiences and advice/guidance that mixed well with professional information/guidance."*

*"Re-inforced and reminded me that we know our child best. Gave ideas of how to monitor things and tools to help unpick what could be causing behaviours."*

### What does the programme cover?

- Accessing services and supports
- Emotional wellbeing and resilience for caregivers
- Supporting sleep for children
- Supporting communication
- Supporting skills development
- Positive approaches to behaviours that challenge



### Challenges

- Sustainability of the programme as only one parent facilitator and two professional facilitators remain (previously three pairs of facilitators)
- Provision of crèche was only possible with support from Ability Shetland although the sustainability of this is uncertain
- PSHVS capacity to continue to facilitate programme

### Next Steps

- To strengthen links with other services to build capacity and sustain the programme and crèche - identify additional facilitators and funding for training and a sustainable model for creche
- To continue to offer a pre-course information session
- To consider offering caregivers a re-connector session / additional workshops in collaboration with Education Outreach / Allied Health colleagues

# Learning to Read in the Early Years Professional Learning Programme

## October 2025 - April 2026



### Overview

For the first time, Shetland participated in this national programme that supports staff to develop their understanding of how children learn to read in the early years. It links research directly to practice using Education Scotland's Learning to Read in the Early Years resource. Participants engaged through videos, reflective questions, dialogue, leading to a small enquiry project.

### Involvement

Education Support Officer & 3 staff from each of the following:

- Bell's Brae Primary School
- Mid Yell ELC & Primary School
- Cunningsburgh ELC & Primary School



### Participation Aims

- Strengthen knowledge of early reading development
- Use research to inform teaching and planning
- Engage in professional dialogue across settings
- Develop self-evaluation skills
- Lead change through a small enquiry project

### Focus

- Creating a literacy-rich environment through interactions, experiences and spaces
- Developing early reading skills
- Supporting children to become independent and engaged readers



### Bell's Brae - P1

*An example of how the enquiry project supported staff to create measurable aims and how to use a PDSA cycle.*

**Aim:** By the end of term 3 2026, at least 75% of pupils in P1 will be able to recognise at least the first 10 tricky words from Jolly Phoincs Scheme.

**Change ideas were generated and implemented using a PDSA cycle.**

**Impact:** By the end of term 3, 83% of pupils in P1 could recognise at least the first 10 tricky words. This led to more confidence when reading and much more awareness of noticing tricky words in text. This improved reading fluency.

**Reflections:** A small focus can lead to a big improvement. We would like to do this again with next years P1 pupils. We are already thinking of how we can do something similar in nursery.

### Cunningsburgh - ELC

*An example of how the professional learning programme encouraged practitioners to use the '4 Cs reflection model'.*

**Concept:** building a literacy rich environment across ELC.

**Connections:**

- Building knowledge of the child as a reader.
- Varied learning styles.
- Digital technology.
- Children's voice.
- Continuous provision.



**Challenges:**

- Engagement of children.
- Use of iPads - general size and weight.
- Positioning the QR codes.

**Changes:**

- Updating new QR codes around the setting in each area.
- Different genres (fact/fiction) and areas of current interest.
- Making iPads available around the setting.

**Changes we did not expect to see:**

- The confident children helped and supported their less-confident peers to access the codes.
- Increased confidence, seeing themselves as authors and illustrators.
- The children have been engaged in making their own books based on their interests.



### Mid Yell

*An example of how each member of staff from within the trio led on a different enquiry project across the ELC and primary school.*

**Enquiry project 1 led by ELC senior practitioner:**

self-evaluation process and staff observations identified rhyme recognition and production as an area requiring attention.

**Enquiry project 2 led by play practitioner:**

we noticed that children were not choosing to access texts during their play.

**Enquiry project 3 led by depute head teacher:**

interventions in P4-7 classroom were not clearly linked to specific needs/barriers, were too generic and were taking place out with the classroom leading to negative experiences.

### Reflections from Mid Yell

- Using the PDSA cycle as a planning tool helped to keep our projects focused and measurable.
- We would use this format for future change projects.
- Changes that were made we are now working on embedding them into our practice.
- A very worthwhile project to be part of

### Next Steps

- Shetland Islands Council has requested to be part of the next cohort for session 2026-2027.
- Use of the PDSA cycle and 4 C's reflection model will be used in other improvement areas.



# Care Day Friday 20 February 2026: 'Making a Meid'

## What did we do and why?

The theme of this year's Care Day was #ConnectedbyCare. To celebrate, the Meids group hosted an event in Lerwick Town Hall during which 25 participants engaged in an activity called 'Making a Meid'. Adapted from Shift Up's 'trusted adult exercise', it encouraged participants to reflect, individually and in small groups, on the qualities and skills that make a good 'Meid' (our term for corporate parent).

The activity built on the commitments made in the Meids Pledge, signed on Care Day 2024. The pledge sets out Meid's commitments to listen, to act with love, to collaborate well, to have high aspirations for care experienced people and to fight their corner, ensuring services 'go the extra mile'.

## Which qualities and skills make a great Meid?

Young people and corporate parents consistently named similar qualities and skills.

Top ranked:

- 1 **Reliable**, also expressed in 'being accountable and no empty promises', 'follow through', 'consistent' (25 votes)
- 2 **Genuine**, also expressed in 'realness' and being 'authentic' (17)
- 3 **Listening** (11) – and whilst this didn't receive as many votes, it was the only quality/skill named by every group



Figure 1 Making a Meid in action



Figure 2 Qualities and skills of a Meid

Participants also explored:

*What circumstances bring out the best in me?*

*What environments do I need to thrive?*

## What next?

Insights from the 'Making a Meid' activity have led to the Meids group deciding to take a trauma-lens to the Meids Board, with a view to refreshing how Meids meetings are run in light of the trauma-informed principles of safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment.

Care Day 2026 activity forms part of the participation workstream associated with the development phase (2026/27) of our local Meids Promise (corporate parenting) Plan, supported by capacity in Children's Services.

Prepared by Freya Collier-Sewell, Programme Manager  
Children's Social Work, May 2026

# The NEurodivergent peer Support Toolkit (NEST) AHS Pilot Group

Lana Smith - Autism and Neurodiversity Teacher lana.smith@shetland.gov.uk 2025/26



## The NEurodivergent peer Support Toolkit (NEST)



This toolkit is designed to help mainstream secondary schools establish a peer support group for neurodivergent young people.  
This toolkit has been created by researchers at the University of Edinburgh, neurodivergent young people and a neurodiverse group of adults who work with neurodivergent young people.

### What is NEST?

The NEurodivergent peer Support Toolkit (NEST) was created by researchers at the University of Edinburgh, neurodivergent young people and a neurodiverse group of adults who work with neurodivergent young people.

The NEST peer support toolkit is a suite of materials to facilitate peer support for neurodivergent young people (with or without a diagnosis) in mainstream secondary schools. Neurotypical allies may join if invited by the group.

NEST groups aims to:

- provide a safe space for neurodivergent students have fun with their peers
- engage in their choice of activities
- learn about neurodiversity
- explore feelings related to their own neurodivergence

### The NEST group in action:

NEST was piloted at the Anderson High School in Term 3 and 4 during the 24/25 academic year and has been running consistently ever since; it currently takes place on Wednesdays Period four.

The NEST group meets one period per week and is facilitated by the Educational Psychology service's Autism and Neurodiversity Teacher, and a school Support for Learning Teacher.

The group started with a small group of five pupils and grew by a further three members by the end of the 24/25 academic year. We now have a consistent attendance of nine pupils and have secured the use of a larger space to accommodate this.

Pupils and staff collaborate at the start of the session to create a plan for the term; alternating each week between a focused learning session and a fun session. Highlights have been:

- Getting to know each other
- Exploring neurodiversity
- Looking at Policy
- Working towards positive change
- Pupil voice being heard - in line with SIP
- Pupil's co-delivering a presentation to ASN teachers at the SDG

Our pupils created a group charter outlining the values of the group.



NEST group pupils and group facilitators who co-delivered a presentation to ASN teachers at the Subject Development Group.

The NEST ethos is centered around four core concepts:

★ BELONGING ★ INCLUSIVITY

★ ACCEPTANCE ★ ADVOCACY

These are explored through four topics:

★ FUN ★ KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

★ SCHOOL COMMUNITY ★ POLICY

## What the young people say:

Feedback from pupils was really positive leading us to believe the young people have found NEST to be useful; many of whom are still attending the group currently (Term 4 25/26).

### "The difference in me"

"I like to be in this group because I get to be with friends and people who understand."

"I enjoy it and I like learning about the neurodiversities, that's my favourite part."

"It's really nice and we get to be ourselves"

### "How I'd describe the adults"

Kind

You understand us

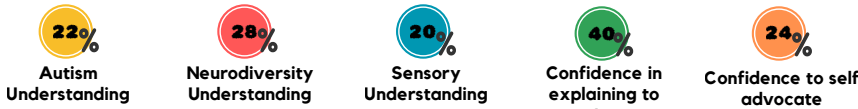
You look forward to seeing us

You make us feel comfortable

Respectful

When asked whether they would recommend attending NEST to a friend, 100% of pupils said **yes**.

A star-rating questionnaire used to capture pupil learning outcomes over a term showed percentage increases in the following areas:



### Staff Feedback

"I have been very impressed with the engagement of young people in the NEST Group. Lana and Nat have created a lovely, nurturing and supportive environment for the young people involved, and, as a result, the young people have felt empowered to contribute their ideas around how we can develop and improve the support available for all of our children and young people in the school. I am really looking forward to continue to support the work of the NEST Group moving forward."  
- Head Teacher

"Our AHS NEST group have benefitted from learning about the complexity of neurodiversity, as well as pioneering the very principles of celebrating diversity in an inclusive learning setting through student-chosen activities promoting peer learning and wellbeing"  
- Sfl Teacher

### Lessons Learned and Next Steps:

A positive group dynamic is integral to the success of the group and goes hand in hand with group members feeling safe enough to unmask and be themselves. Pupils are typically identified through the Child Planning process before being invited to attend. Staff will talk to the pupil to let them know what to expect and whether the group is something they would like to try.

#### Next Steps:

- **AHS school staff to lead this group.**
- **Consider format for knowledge building sessions** - incorporate more fun and interactive strategies & implement a 10 minute cooling off transition to end.
- **Data collection methods** have been created for reflection and moderation: group attendance to track numbers, wellbeing exit tickets to reflect on pupil experiences as well as pre and post input questionnaire centred around the core values of NEST.
- **A group is also now established in Aith.** Dates have been proposed for **Brae** to begin toward the end of Term 4 and discussion is being had with **Sandwick** around identifying a suitable time to start a group.
- **P7 Transition** - Enhanced transition opportunity for pupils to take part in established NEST groups in Term 4 creating social connections within the school they are transitioning to.

NEST FEEDBACK  
Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_  
We want to hear from you!

Question	Strongly Dislike	Dislike	Neutral	Like	Strongly Like
1. I feel like I belong at school	☹️	☹️	😊	😊	😊
2. I have at least one person my age in school who understands me	☹️	☹️	😊	😊	😊
3. I feel accepted for who I am	☹️	☹️	😊	😊	😊
4. I know who to talk to in school if I'm struggling	☹️	☹️	😊	😊	😊
5. I understand my rights/what fair support looks like in school	☹️	☹️	😊	😊	😊
6. I feel like I can manage school	☹️	☹️	😊	😊	😊
7. I feel confident in asking for what I need in school	☹️	☹️	😊	😊	😊

Pupil Feedback Questionnaire

EXIT TICKET  
Today / felt:

Welcomed.....	😊😊😊😊😊
Unsure.....	😊😊😊😊😊
Uncomfortable.....	😊😊😊😊😊
Relaxed.....	😊😊😊😊😊
Stressed.....	😊😊😊😊😊
In-between.....	😊😊😊😊😊
Connected.....	😊😊😊😊😊
Alone.....	😊😊😊😊😊
In-between.....	😊😊😊😊😊

Exit Ticket

Neurographic art created by a NEST member conveying how they feel in the group.



Slides taken from our Head Teacher feedback session - pupil views on policy.

POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR AND RELATIONSHIPS TOOLKIT: Language choice - how can we make this more inclusive/positive?

Having to ask to go to the toilet can be overwhelming

Prepared and on time - how does this look for various pupils?

Arriving to Class - Checklist (✓)

- Always arrive prepared and on time.
- If you need to go to the toilet, register with your class teacher first.
- Remove jackets/hats/hoods and put headphones/earpods away.
- Switch off phones and other devices; put these either in school bags or phone pockets on wall.
- Settle quickly.
- Be ready to start.

Sensory needs may mean that this measure hinders pupil engagement.

Some pupils may take longer to settle; universal support strategies can aid this.

Pupils may prefer to tick on return from toilet, instead of writing a time.

Positive Behavior and Relationships - Pupil views "Arriving to Class".

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Priority 2: Continue to evolve the school's curriculum including the ethos and life of the school. Improve approaches to feedback to staff.

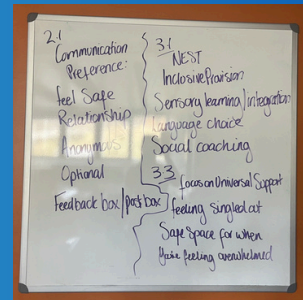
The idea of a feedback postbox was proposed by one of our pupils. (see yellow paper with pupil's design)

Pupils stated that they need to feel safe to speak to the adults in their school. They need to have positive relationships; which is built on a two-way feeling of trust.

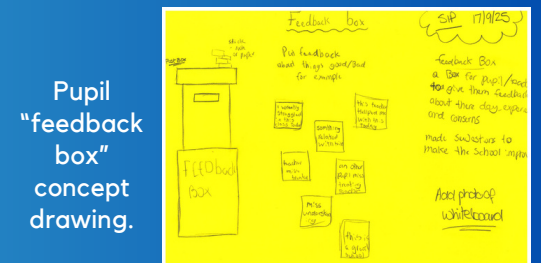
Pupils said that feedback needs to be optional.

Pupils would like to feedback in an anonymous way.

School Improvement Plan - Pupil views "Improve approaches to feedback to staff".



Notes taken throughout School Improvement Plan discussion with pupils.



Pupil "feedback box" concept drawing.



Pupil presenting the group's proposal to the Head Teacher.

# EARLY ADOPTER COMMUNITIES ACTIVITIES IN THE WEST MAINLAND

Local placed based approaches to childcare



Project	Delivery / Opening Times	Key updates
Happyhansel Primary School Breakfast Club	5 days a week (8:15am-8:40am). Operating since September 2024.	The club has maintained consistent delivery and reliable attendance, with participation ranging from 3 to 10 children per session.
Happyhansel Primary School After-school Club	Tuesdays & Thursdays (3:15-4:45). Operating since November 2024.	The club was temporarily paused in 2025 due to staffing constraints and has since resumed operations, although staffing challenges remain.
West Mainland Bus and supervision	Mondays and Wednesdays. The bus picks children up from Sandness School at 2.55pm and Happyhansel School at 3.05pm and takes them to the West Mainland Leisure Centre.	Supervision but in place at Leisure Centre enables children to access activities independently, reducing the need for parent accompaniment
Sandness Activities on Friday	Fortnightly Fridays (2pm-4:30pm). Started Friday 29 August 2025.	Activities for local children of primary or nursery age. Parents/carers are invited to accompany their child. A total of 7 families with 13 children have attended these sessions.
Holiday Provision - MAD Days	Held on Mondays during holiday periods (10am-3pm). Includes bus pick up/drop off.	Sessions were delivered during the Summer, October, and Easter holiday periods, with attendance averaging 30-40 children per session.
Ability Shetland Saturday Club and Holiday Club	Saturday Club takes place every 2nd week, and Holiday Club takes place on Wednesdays during the holidays.	EAC fund supports staffing for the West Mainland Saturday and Holiday Clubs.
Happyhansel ELC completed variation for 2 year olds.	Care Inspectorate visited in February 2026 and approved variation for 2 year olds.	Resources provided for 2 year old provision. Communication with families in progress.

# EARLY ADOPTER COMMUNITIES ACTIVITIES IN THE NORTH ISLES

Local placed based approaches to childcare



Project	Delivery / Opening Times	Key updates
Support worker ELC recruited in Mid-Yell ELC	Recruited in October 2025.	This has allowed for an increased number of paid 2 year olds in the setting and a more reliable service for families.
Support worker ELC recruited in Baltasound ELC	Recruited in January 2025.	This has allowed for an increased number of paid 2 year olds in the setting and a more reliable service for families.
Working with Mid-Yell and Baltasound ELCs to enhance quality care for 2 year olds	Investment has been made in resources specifically designed to support the development of two year olds.	Common themes have emerged after settings were asked what resources were needed to enhance quality. For example, furniture at the right height, age-appropriate clothing
North Isles Holiday Provision for Primary aged children	Activity days took place once a week during the holidays (10am-3pm). Includes bus pick up/drop off between the islands.	Sessions were delivered during the Summer and Easter holidays, with attendance averaging around 30 children per session. Activities took place at Unst Leisure Centre and Mid Yell Leisure Centre.
Activity days for Secondary pupils during the summer holidays 2026	Planning is underway for five Summer 2026 holiday sessions, designed to run alongside activities for primary aged children.	Activity days aligned to the primary school programme to provide a coordinated offer for local families.
Ability Shetland Family Days	Took place in May 2026. 2 Family Days were delivered in Yell and 1 in Unst.	EAC fund supports staffing and hire costs for these sessions. Attendance averaged 9 families per session, with repeat attendance in Yell supporting relationship building.
Discussions about Cullivoe Primary School Breakfast Club	Not yet in operation	Discussions are ongoing with the headteacher at Cullivoe, who has identified a Learning Support Worker to deliver the club.