ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	4 July 2023
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Anti-bullying policy and Guidance
REPORT NUMBER	CFS/23/201
DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne
REPORT AUTHOR	Mark Hearns
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.5

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report presents a refreshed Anti-bullying policy for approval and seeks approval to implement the refreshed policy from August 2023.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee: -

2.1 approves the content of the policy; and

2.2 instructs the Chief Education Officer to implement the policy from August 2023.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

3.1 The current Anti-bullying policy was established in 2017. A review of data in July 2022 highlighted that Aberdeen is becoming more multi-cultural with a variety of different cultures and nationalities bringing even greater richness to the city. Although the number of children and young people in our schools who identify as being Polish has remained consistent over the last 4 years, the number of families of African descent has nearly doubled (from 967 in 2019 to 1756 in 2022). There is also a considerable increase in the number of children who identify as being 'white-other' due to an increase in the number of families making Aberdeen their home whilst fleeing conflict.

3.2 All of our schools promote diversity and inclusion to ensure that all members of the school community feel included, and our practices and policies support this. A key measure which indicates that children are thriving in inclusive schools is the level of bullying incidents reported and associated declining trends. The data identifies that bullying reporting has been relatively static when you take account of school building closures over recent years. In 2020 there were 70 recorded incidents attributed to racism, 39 in 2021 and 36 in 2022.

3.3 Bullying incidents where race and racism were recorded as the perceived reason have also reduced. In September 2022 there were 7, 11 in October 2022, 20 in November 2022 and 6 in December 2022.

3.4 In terms of the number of incidents of pupils experiencing bullying which are recorded as having other protected characteristics, this is also a declining trend. The data reports that in September 2022 - there were 173, in October 2022 126, November 2022 135, and in December 2022 42.

3.5 However, further scrutiny of the data has identified changed trends in bullying incidents. For example, there has been a significant increase in the number of bullying incidents which refer to body image/physical appearance. Additionally, there is a gender aspect which is evident and identifies that 70% of bullying incidents are raised by girls. The perceived reasons and nature are also changing. There has been an increase in recording of incidents around Gender identity.

3.6 This data is reflected in the intelligence and reports which we have received from our partners at Grampian Regional Equality Council (GREC). GREC advised that the number of Prejudice and Discrimination reports has increased in the last half year compared to the last, and significantly compared with the same period in 2020-21 at the height of the pandemic which is possibly unsurprising given the lessened visibility. Most reports GREC receives relate to **race or ethnicity**, and **sexual orientation**. This learning has triggered the revision of our policy to include a raised awareness of the protected characteristics. It is thought that this approach, coupled with greater consistency in reporting, will support staff in responding and challenging any form of bullying including racist incidents and gender based violence.

3.7 Officers continue to routinely monitor bullying data, and a range of data and intelligence would suggest that the recording of bullying incidents is inconsistent. Schools that have systematic approaches in place to monitor bullying report a reduction in bullying incident types over time. However, the monitoring of incidents of bullying is not yet consistent across our schools and there is a need to improve arrangements for the recording and monitoring of bullying and ensure robust and consistent analysis and reduction of bullying incidents. This will help to identify trends or themes in bullying and support planning for improvement.

3.8 In 2021 there were 98 recorded incidents of bullying in our secondary schools. One school accounted for 28% of the total and 3 schools accounted for 77.5%. Upon careful analysis, this actually signifies that some schools have more comprehensive approaches in place. In 2022, there were 234 recorded incidents of bullying. One school accounted for 38% of the total recorded incidents and 3 schools accounted for 68% of the total number of bullying incidents recorded in 2022. Similar patterns are evident, with those reporting higher incidents having more robust arrangements.

3.9 There were 104 recorded incidents of bullying across our Primary schools in 2021 and 120 in 2022. The data identifies a broader spread of schools recording incidents, although one school accounts for 10% of incidents in both years.

There are examples of good practice, but schools must regularly record bullying incidents accurately and monitor this information systematically. The proposed revised Policy will ensure that there is more rigour from schools in the recording and monitoring of bullying incidents.

3.10   Considerable national focus has been placed on bullying with several reports and guidance documents published since 2017. In accordance with Scotland's National Anti-Bullying Service; 'Respectme', Aberdeen City Council Children and Family Services define bullying as the following: *'Bullying is both behaviour and impact; the impact is on a person's capacity to feel in control of themselves. This is what we term as their sense of 'agency'. Bullying takes place in the context of relationships; it is behaviour that can make people feel hurt, threatened, frightened, and left out. This behaviour happens face to face and online.'* Respect for All: The National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People.

3.11   The updates to the Policy include the definition of bullying being amended in line with the National Guidance: Respect for All: The National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People 2017. The system for recording instances of bullying has been strengthened to clarify adherence to the national guidance. Guidance: Bullying & Equalities: Recording and Monitoring Bullying Incidents in Schools (RAMBIS). https://www.gov.scot/publications/supplementary-guidance-recording-monitoring-bullying-incidents-schools/

3.12   The Anti-Bullying Policy additionally takes account of outcomes and recommendations from the: Approaches to recording and monitoring incidents of bullying in Schools (National thematic review, February 2023). [National Review: Approaches to recording and monitoring incidents of bullying in schools | National Thematic Inspections | HM Chief Inspector Report | Inspection and review | What we do | Education Scotland](#)

3.13   There are indications that not all learners currently feel confident about reporting incidents of alleged bullying. This policy will ensure that schools have a pro-active and responsive approach to the prevention and management of bullying incidents with confidence.

3.14   Invaluable learning has been gleaned from the [Life in Scotland research](#) undertaken in 2021/22. This research was undertaken during a challenging time for young people, following almost two years of disruption due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The research looked at the experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, questioning (LGBTQ) young people and 1279 responded nationally. Most respondents believe that homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are a problem, both across Scotland as a whole, and in their local area.

- 69% of participants believe that transphobia is a big problem in Scotland.
- Only 10% of participants rated the experience of school for LGBT people as 'good'.
- 70% of gay/lesbian participants report experiencing bullying due to their sexual orientation at school.

3.15   The key messages and data from this national survey resonate with the data and intelligence reviewed locally which shows an increase of incidents recorded which are related to gender identity and sexual orientation from 16 in 2019 to 72 in 2022.   As we move forward the service will monitor this data carefully.

Feedback from Parents and Carers

3.16   Consultation with Parents and Carers indicated that most felt that their school promoted respect and positive relationships. Parents did feel confident around reporting incidents of bullying to the school. Parents were unclear as to what was a shared understanding of bullying and would welcome a consistent definition of bullying, and this has been included in the policy. Parents wanted to see a consistent and robust response to bullying.

3.17   Parents were concerned around the increase of bullying through technology and social media(cyber-bullying) and highlighted the benefits of input or training around online and mobile technology for both pupils and Parents/Carers. Parents emphasised the importance of school staff working in partnership with Parents/Carers when dealing with bullying and being aware of their professional responsibilities in addressing bullying and discrimination. Parents stated that they did not always feel included, and that the outcome of an incident was not always communicated with them. This feedback has helped inform the policy.

3.18   Parents requested that there should be a means of communication for a pupil to report instances of bullying without there being a negative impact on the pupil because of reporting. Parents additionally wanted more detail on prejudice-based bullying. Parents were unclear how a school records incidents of bullying and would welcome more information on this.

Consultation with children and young people

3.19   Consultation with pupils highlighted the importance of the need for consistency in staff responding, reporting, and managing bullying incidences. Not all pupils felt confident about reporting incidents of alleged bullying and highlighted concerns about confidentiality and the actions their schools may take to follow up incidents of bullying. Themes identified included pupils feeling that reporting incidents of bullying may make the matter worse or that the alleged incident is not taken seriously. Pupils stated that they wanted their views to be considered and valued when incidents of bullying are investigated, and that staff should respect privacy and confidentiality. Pupils would welcome 'safe spaces' being made available and would provide reassurance for them knowing that there was a 'safe' place they could go to.

3.20   The pupils acknowledged that there were a range of procedures in place to manage instances of bullying in schools but at times responses were inconsistent. References were made to the increase in online cyber bullying which often happens out with school and the importance to be aware of the dangers of online and mobile technology communication. The updated definition gives clarity on bullying and the impact of it. It is thought that the refreshed policy will support pupils feel more confident about reporting alleged incidents of bullying and result in a consistent response and approach from all

staff. The refreshed policy will ensure that all staff are aware of their role in preventing, responding, and recording bullying incidents.

3.21 Learning from national documentation and stakeholder voice has informed the development of the policy in Appendix A.

Consultation with GREC (Grampian Regional Equality Council)

3.22 We have consulted with external partners from GREC (Grampian Regional Equality Council) who report that the experience for pupils is not always a positive one in terms of reporting incidents of bullying. They reported that there appeared to be a perception that there is a hierarchy of protected characteristics, i.e., that racist-related incidents are taken more seriously than homophobia or transphobia. Related to this, it seems that there is no option for a transphobic (or faith-based) incident to be reported on the SEEMIS system, and the system seems to have a general problem with a lack of granularity and inconsistent grouping of categories.

3.23 Incidents of teachers "dead naming" (referring to a trans person by their birth name) have been shared. There is a sense that there is a lack of appreciation for the damaging impact that this can have on a Trans person, particularly a young individual. The data indicates that not all cases are being reported using the GREC and SEEMIS Bullying and Equalities module. This means that schools/teachers/pupils are not being offered the support that is available in terms of advice, workshops, counselling and intervention.

3.24 GREC believe that the refreshed policy will support raising awareness of all forms of bullying and that all staff will know their role in responding to and reporting bullying incidents. Systemic and robust recording of the number of bullying incidents using The Bullying and Equalities (B&E) Module within SEEMIS Click and Go, which must include specific detail e.g., in the instance of transphobic bullying, specifically detail the transphobic elements which will support appropriate preventions.

Consultation with staff

3.25 Staff were consulted on the document. Staff seek clear expectations and responsibilities for staff/pupils/parents and carers and reiterated the importance of working in partnerships. Staff welcomed the clear reference to LGBT+ community.

3.26 This policy will be monitored by the Quality Improvement team through the collation of data received from the outlined reporting mechanisms.
This policy will be subject to initial review in 12 months and subsequently every 3 years.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Local Authority has many legal duties which it is obliged to meet, including those of:
- The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 as amended
- The Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

5.2 The approach outlined in this Report will assist the Council to fulfil these duties more effectively. All children and young people have the right to learn in an environment that is free from bullying. Those who experience bullying can have a detrimental impact on their education and can be a significant factor in determining positive or negative long-term outcomes for children and young people. The Anti-Bullying Policy and Guidance 2023 will support the prevention of bullying incidents and ensure that there is consistency in their reporting, recording, and monitoring and are managed within the current legislative framework.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 No negative environmental impacts have been identified.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve. Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *Taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	N/A			
Compliance	Risk of discriminating against those with protected characteristics. Every person has one or more of the defined protected characteristics. Non-compliance with legislation, and legal challenge	This policy contributes to the process of compliance and evidence actions and mitigations. Robust and Systemic Recording and Monitoring of bullying incidents will support mitigating this risk.	L	Yes

	Aberdeen City Council is obliged to meet the requirements of The Equality Act (2010) equalities legislation which protects individuals. from unfair and discriminatory treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society	All members of staff will have access to a copy of the anti-bullying policy. It is of key importance that relevant local authority and school staff working in partnership with other agencies are appropriately trained to build confidence and capacity to recognise and respond to bullying. The approval and implementation of the revised policy and accompanying procedure and guidance should help to mitigate this risk.		
Operational	Risk that Incidents of bullying are not managed consistently reflecting best practice which if not applied can result in complaints. Risk that there are inconsistencies in reporting incidents of bullying which will impact accuracy of data.	This policy will provide Schools and staff with clarity on the authorities' expectations about what constitutes bullying behaviour, how to respond to bullying behaviour and how to monitor and report incidents. All incidents of bullying MUST be recorded using the Bullying and Equalities (B&E) Module within SEEMIS Click and Go This will support consistent reporting and recording of bullying incidents. Consistent application of the guidance provided in	L	Yes

		the policy will mitigate risk. Staff will have access to appropriate training and professional learning which will provide staff with necessary skills in prevention and managing of bullying incidents. Mitigated by offering high quality professional learning for staff to ensure that they meet their statutory duties under The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 and Equality Act (2010)		
Financial	No Financial Risks identified	Delivery of staff anti-bullying related training Any potential costs are met within existing budgets	L	Yes
Reputational	The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004) requires Authorities to reduce barriers to learning for children and young people with additional support needs. Risk of not achieving positive outcomes for children and young people	All staff will be aware of their key roles and responsibilities that each member of the school community in has; regarding preventing and responding to bullying behaviour within the policy. The Policy will ensure Establishments promote consistency of response to instances of bullying behaviour. Regular analysis of the data will ensure appropriate	L	Yes

	and their parents and carers	responses, interventions, and prevention management.			
Environment / Climate	No environmental risks identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	

8. OUTCOMES

COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	The activities listed within this report support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement. • Supporting people with the cost of living • A city of opportunity through equitable means • A vibrant city that is accessible • An active city • A prosperous city • Empowering Aberdeen's Communities • Caring for each other • A safer Aberdeen • A transparent, accessible and accountable Council

Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
Prosperous People - 95% of all our children, including those living in our priority neighbourhoods, will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026.	The policy links to the 'Prosperous People' theme in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP), which mentions people being entitled to live in a way they feel safe, supported, and fully included in life in the City, having an equal right to enjoy these aspirations. All people in the city are entitled to live in a manner in which they feel safe and protected from harm and supported where necessary in addition, it indicates an ambition to support every child irrespective of circumstances to grow, develop and reach their full potential, where there is equality of opportunity for all. The proposals in this report seek to ensure the best use of resource in the system, promoting an understanding of the circumstances of individual children and young people to ensure that appropriate and timely personalised support is available to them. Child friendly city which supports all children to prosper and engage actively where all decisions

Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	which impact on children and young people are informed by them by 2026. • 4.1 Improving the knowledge, understanding and skill of the universal workforce to recognise and respond to emerging mental wellbeing vulnerability. • 4.2 Increasing children's knowledge and understanding of their own physical and mental wellbeing. 90% of children and young people will report that they feel mentally well by 2026. • 5. 90% of Children and young people will report that their experiences of mental health and wellbeing have been listened to by 2026. • 6. As corporate parents we will ensure 95% of care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, health and emotional wellbeing, and positive destinations as their peers by 2026. • 7. 95% of children living in our priority neighbourhoods will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026. The policy also links to the 'Prosperous Place' theme in the LOIP, where all can prosper, reflecting the organisation's desire to help people, families, and communities to do well, succeed and flourish in every aspect, regardless of their background or circumstances. Underpinning the work of all schools in Aberdeen City is achieving excellence and equity for all.
Regional and City Strategies	This report takes into account the local authority's legal obligations in respect of the legislation below: **The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004** • Duties regarding meeting the needs of children and young people with additional support needs. **The Equality Act 2010** • Duty to ensure we are not discriminating disabled learners directly or indirectly. • In addition, the Fairer Scotland Duty (Part 1 of the Equality Act 2010) places a legal responsibility on particular public bodies in Scotland to actively consider how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions

	The Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000 • Duty of education authority in providing school education • Raising standards • Requirement that education be provided in mainstream schools. **The National Improvement Framework** Education Authorities are under a duty to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of education of school education which is provided in the schools managed by them and to carry out the duty with a view to achieving the strategic priorities set out in the National Improvement Framework.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Required.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	
Other	None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

11. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Anti-bullying Policy 2023.

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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