

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

ABERDEEN, 30 April 2024. Minute of Meeting of the EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE. Present:- Councillor Greig, Convener; Councillor Mennie, Vice-Convener; and Councillors Allard, Blake, Bouse, Brooks, Hazel Cameron, Crockett (as substitute for Councillor Mrs Stewart), Hutchison (as substitute for Councillor Fairfull), Malik (as substitute for Councillor Grant), McLeod, Radley and MacGregor. External Members:- Mrs Frances Cardno (Parent Representative - Primary Schools/ASN) (to article 11), Mr Michael Crawford (Parent Representative - Secondary / ASN) (to article 11), Mr Doug Haywood (Teacher Representative - Primary Schools) (to article 11), Ms Jacqueline Munro (Teacher Representative - Secondary Schools) (to article 11), Mr John Murray (Roman Catholic Religious Representative) (to article 11), Mr Madhav Regmi (Third Religious Representative) (for articles 7 to 11) and Mrs Hilda Smith (Church of Scotland representative) (for articles 5 to 11).

The agenda and reports associated with this minute can be located [here](#).

Please note that if any changes are made to this minute at the point of approval, these will be outlined in the subsequent minute and this document will not be retrospectively altered.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND TRANSPARENCY STATEMENTS

1. The following statements of transparency were noted:-
 - Mr Murray made a general statement of transparency, noting that his daughter taught at St Peter's RC School and he had two grandchildren at St Joseph's RC School, but he did not consider that this amounted to an interest which would prevent him from participating in the meeting; and
 - in relation to item 9.1 (Inspection Reporting), the Convener advised for reasons of transparency that he was an elder of Fountainhall Church which owned the building occupied by Queen's Cross Nursery, however he did not consider that this required him to declare an interest for that item, and he would therefore remain in the meeting and participate in the discussion.

DEPUTATION - MR DAVID WILLIS AND MR KEVIN MASSON, GMB - IN RESPECT OF ITEM 10.1

2. The Committee heard from Mr David Willis and Mr Kevin Masson, representing the GMB, in respect of the report at item 10.1 (Behaviour Report).

Mr Willis explained that he was the Convener of the GMB Trade Union. He thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak. He asked that Members note from the report that GMB had welcomed all the commitments agreed in the action plan, however a key demand made by the GMB in response to the unacceptable behaviour that their Members were facing had not been met. The GMB had called for a working group to be established

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to review the Additional Support Needs (ASN) provision within the city, and Mr Willis asked that the Committee give officers an instruction to undertake that review. He explained that the GMB were seeing an increasing number of learners with additional support needs, and a limited number of places within specialist settings, meaning that more learners with complex additional support needs were placed in mainstream settings.

He explained that the GMB were not against inclusion, but there was a need to ensure that the environment was suitable, and the resource sufficient for both the young people and the staff supporting them. Staff needed to be suitably trained for the situations they faced, and Mr Willis explained that he did not believe that was currently the case. He noted that he had been horrified when he first learned that bite guards were being issued to their members, and stated that PPE should always be a last resort, noting that it might reduce the risk, but it did not eliminate it completely. He added that schools were now issuing Kevlar hoodies as staff had had their hair pulled out by the roots, and he was aware of one setting where the Kevlar sleeves had proved insufficient, and thick leather welding gauntlets were being issued instead. Mr Willis stated that no employee should have to go to work with that level of fear for their personal safety.

Mr Willis said that there were settings where classrooms were having to be evacuated on a daily basis due to dysregulated behaviour, and entire buildings emptied on a weekly basis. He added that he understood that dysregulated behaviour could be a form of communication, but asked if the level of disruption would still be seen if the environment was more suitable and the child was being nourished. He asked if the Council was 'Getting it Right' for that child, and indeed for every child. Mr Willis advised that the GMB had been informed by Education officers that there was no expectation for any staff member to put their hands on a child, which was to be welcomed, and yet there was a dichotomy where members told the GMB that they had received training on how to restrain a child exhibiting dysregulated behaviour.

Within the behaviour report, Mr Willis noted that the resilience of staff was called into question. He added that he found this particularly galling, and believed that the examples he had given demonstrated that that section of staff were being pushed to breaking point, noting that there were many more examples available. Mr Willis explained that essential workers were feeling undervalued and unappreciated, and he believed that a thorough review of ASN provision, and the actions that informed, would go a long way to restoring the belief that their employer was one that cared for their welfare and respected the contribution they made to nourishing the young people within their care.

Mr Masson then added that nationally, in 2013, around 131,000 pupils in schools had required ASN provision. Recent figures showed this was now around 250,000 pupils, or 36.7% of the current school population. During that time, every ASN child would have had a co-ordinated support plan, however Mr Masson added that this had now fallen by 60%. Therefore the number of ASN children had doubled, but the number of support plans had halved. He added that this information had been taken from the Scottish

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Children's Services Coalition, and it stated that this was having an impact in terms of surging levels of school violence. He explained that the GMB had seen an increase in the number of reports from their members in respect of violence against them, including being bitten, having bones broken, having hair pulled out and being scratched, not to mention the impact on their mental health from stress and trauma.

Mr Masson explained that he was not having a go at Aberdeen City Council, nor the Education team, and in fact he thought Aberdeen was one of the best places there was and so it should be a leading example in addressing the problems. He added that the GMB had had excellent working relationships with the Education service, and they would wholeheartedly want that to continue. He advised that he and Mr Willis were at Committee because they wanted recognition that there was a problem with the ASN provision within mainstream settings. He stated that it was about resource; about making sure that buildings were fit for the needs of children; about ensuring that staff had the proper training and facilities; and that there was the correct number of resources to ensure that the young learners had the best possible provision to have the best possible future. He added that this was why the GMB had requested a working group to be set up, asking that the Council be honest and transparent and see exactly what the demand was, where Aberdeen currently sat, and whether the correct resources existed or whether more were required.

Mr Masson referred to the Scottish Government's Behaviour in Schools report 2023, noting that it clearly indicated that there had been a significant increase in aggressive behaviour in schools, with on average around a 50% increase. He added that it all indicated that there was a rising surge in behaviour incidents in particular schools, but also that there was a need for ASN provision in schools to be fully supported. He noted that the Council could not get it right for every child if it was not getting it right for the staff who supported those children. He concluded by reiterating that the GMB requested that a transparent working group be established to review specialist provision in Aberdeen for the needs of young learners and for the safety of staff. He noted that a 'that will do' attitude was a foundation stone for disaster.

Members then asked questions of the deputation.

The Committee resolved:-

to thank Mr Willis and Mr Masson for their presentation.

MINUTE OF MEETING OF 20 FEBRUARY 2024

3. The Committee had before it the minute of its previous meeting of 20 February 2024 for approval.

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The Committee resolved:-

- (i) in relation to article 7(i), to note that the Clerk would re-share the information circulated from officers on the outline process for the work set out in the Northfield Primaries report with Councillor Blake; and
- (ii) to approve the minute as a correct record.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS PLANNER

4. The Committee had before it the business planner as prepared by the Interim Chief Officer – Governance.

Members asked a number of questions in respect of the delayed items and those recommended for removal.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to agree to remove items 10 (Inspection Reporting – Inspection of Regulatory Care Services); 32 (School Estate Plan - Victorian Schools - feasibility study & options appraisal); 58 (School Estate Plan - Harlaw Academy Improvements - feasibility study); and 59 (School Estate Plan - Ferryhill School - feasibility study) for the reasons outlined in the planner; and
- (ii) to otherwise note the planner.

INSPECTION REPORTING - F&C/24/119

5. The Committee had before it a report by the Interim Executive Director – Families and Communities which detailed the outcome of inspection reports published by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIe) and The Care Inspectorate on the quality of Aberdeen City schools and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings since the last meeting of the Education and Children's Services Committee in February 2024.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee –

- (a) note the content of the report; and
- (b) instruct the Interim Chief Officer – Education and Lifelong Learning to continue to support Early Learning and Childcare settings and schools to implement continuous improvement in keeping with the Quality Improvement Framework agreed at Committee in July 2023.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note that officers would circulate the Queen's Cross Nursery action plan to Members outwith the meeting;
- (ii) to note that the link at section 3.8 of the report was broken and that officers would circulate a new link to Members after the meeting; and

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(iii) to approve the recommendations.

**PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT/NATIONAL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK
PROGRESS REPORT - FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES - CORS/24/117**

6. The Committee had before it a report by the Interim Executive Director – Families and Communities and the Executive Director – Corporate Services which presented (a) the status of key performance measures relating to the Children’s and Family Services function and (b) an interim progress update in relation to implementation of the Aberdeen City Council National Improvement Framework Plan 2023/24.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee note the report and provide comments and observations on the information contained in the report appendices.

The Committee resolved:-

to note the report.

BEHAVIOUR REPORT - F&C/24/121

7. With reference to article 4 of the minute of its previous meeting, the Committee had before it a report by the Interim Executive Director – Families and Communities which detailed the current picture in relation to behaviour in Aberdeen schools; the arrangements in place to promote positive behaviour in schools and outlined procedures currently in place to improve incident reporting. The report also detailed collaborative work undertaken with Trade Unions to develop a shared Action Plan for consideration by the Committee, and an overview of the January Magpie meet and an update on the work of the sub group of Head Teachers looking at how best to utilise resource, in line with the instruction from the last meeting of the Committee.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee –

- (a) note the content of this report;
- (b) instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to work with Trade Unions to co-deliver the Action Plan in Appendix B;
- (c) delegate authority to the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to make any amendments necessary, in consultation with Trade Unions, following the publication of the National Behaviour Plan and update Members of any changes through Service Update; and
- (d) instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to update on progress against the Action Plan through the established performance management reports.

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The Convener, seconded by the Vice Convener, moved:-

That the Committee approve the recommendations in the report, and:-

- (i) acknowledge the challenges related to children's wellbeing, which could impact the behaviour of children and young people in school settings;
- (ii) thank Education staff for their flexibility in supporting children and young people with impaired wellbeing and acknowledge how challenging this could be;
- (iii) thank the EIS, GMB and others for their continuing constructive engagement with Aberdeen City Council on improving our school environments to create safe and nurturing settings for all;
- (iv) instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to continue constructive engagement with Unions and others; such as those with an interest in the provision of supports for those with additional support needs including local organisations and the Northfield Advisors, to allow a continuous improvement journey in all of our schools;
- (v) instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to review the adequacy of the current allocation of pupil support staffing and provision of specialist placements across the city;
- (vi) further instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to consider the output of (iv) and (v) and report options for consideration back to the Education and Children's Services Committee within three cycles;
- (vii) instruct the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to include in the annual School Estate Plan update a workstream to evaluate the physical Additional Support Needs (ASN) provision in individual settings and include a timescale within the plan on when recommendations on potential space for future ASN purposes could be brought forward;
- (viii) instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to continue to work in collaboration with Trade Unions to deliver and evaluate the impact of the agreed Action Plan on children, young people and staff;
- (ix) note that Head Teachers remind staff of agreed school behaviour policies and procedures on the first in-service day; and instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to seek assurance from Head Teachers of the percentage of staff given the opportunity to engage with this;
- (x) instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to report the number of staff who complete the Maybo training as part of the regular update on progress against the Action Plan;
- (xi) note that Aberdeen City Council was leading the way on driving innovative positive change in various areas within Education and Children's Services; however acknowledge this was an ongoing improvement journey and reinforce our commitment to education in this city;
- (xii) therefore, further instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to develop a system in data recording which differentiates information on incidences in schools; to allow further qualitative analysis of need, and to further allow identification of need and targeting of resource.

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Councillor Malik, seconded by Councillor Blake, moved as an amendment:-

That the Committee –

- (i) note the content of this report;
- (ii) note the continued concerns raised by the Trade Unions about ASN provision within the city and instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to implement a review of specialist ASN provision and the finding of the review to be considered as part of the school estate plan;
- (iii) recommend to Council that it establishes a working group of Officers, Trade Unions and Elected Members to work to co-deliver the Action Plan in Appendix B with the addition of (ii) to the action plan with authority to make any amendments necessary, following the publication of the National Behaviour Plan, and update Members of changes through a report to the next Education and Children's Services Committee following publication of the National Plan;
- (iv) agree that the Scottish Government was failing school staff with the continued delay to implementing their National Behaviour Plan; and
- (v) instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to update on progress against the Action Plan through a separate and distinct report to Committee.

On a division, there voted:- for the motion (13) – the Convener; the Vice Convener; Councillors Allard, Bouse, Brooks, Hazel Cameron, Hutchison, MacGregor, McLeod and Radley; and Mrs Cardno, Mr Crawford and Mrs Smith; for the amendment (3) - Councillors Blake, Crockett and Malik; declined to vote (4) – Mr Haywood, Ms Munro, Mr Murray and Mr Regmi.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note that Mike Paul could present learning to the Committee on the trial Bucksburn Academy were undertaking; and
- (ii) to adopt the motion.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING - F&C/24/120

8. The Committee had before it a report by the Interim Executive Director – Families and Communities which set out the findings of the Health and Wellbeing surveys undertaken within Aberdeen City Schools in November and December 2023, and the current support in place for wellbeing, both physical and mental.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee –

- (a) note the content of the report and the data shared within Appendix A;
- (b) instruct the Interim Executive Director - Families and Communities to consider the findings of the report and plan next steps as part of work being taken forward

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- through the Children's Services Plan and associated National Improvement Framework Plan; and
- (c) instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to report the findings of the next Health and Wellbeing surveys to Committee within one calendar year.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to note that officers were considering issuing communication to parents around social media and the use of devices, similar to the attendance communication which had previously been issued;
- (ii) to thank all involved in the ongoing work to support children and young people in achieving better health and wellbeing;
- (iii) to note and welcome the considerable amount of positive interventions in place which were effectively helping and nurturing young people in the city;
- (iv) to note and welcome the significantly increased participation from young people in the latest annual SHINE surveys and instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to work with Head Teachers to encourage participation in future surveys;
- (v) to note and welcome the continued signs of improvements in indicators relating to loneliness, body image, general health, self-harm, low mood;
- (vi) to note the value of the Family Stress Model in identifying emotional, economic and social pressures which affect the wellbeing of children and young people in their home, local and learning environments;
- (vii) to note with concern evidence that indicated that the current cohort of S4 girls were generally outliers in the improvement journey; and, therefore, instruct the Interim Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to give this issue special focus and undertake further targeted work on supportive solutions; with information on actions and outcomes reported back in the agreed report at recommendation (c); and
- (viii) to approve the recommendations.

ABZ CAMPUS - F&C/24/115

9. The Committee had before it a report by the Interim Executive Director – Families and Communities which provided an update on some of the key areas of progress made in implementing Phase 1 of ABZCampus in Session 2023-24 (including the provision of Pathways Advocates); plans in place for Phase 2 in Session 2024- 25; and future plans for Phase 3 in 2025-26.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee –

- (a) note the progress made in delivering Phase 1 of ABZCampus and advanced plans for Phases 2 and 3 which aim to further broaden the curriculum offer for young people in the Senior Phase in Aberdeen City Council schools;

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- (ii) instruct the Interim Chief Officer – Education and Lifelong Learning to support the roll out of Phase 2 and 3 of ABZCampus; and
- (iii) instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to report back on progress including a full review of the impact of Pathways Advocates within one calendar year.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to approve the recommendations;
- (ii) to note that officers would however investigate the possibility of bringing an interim evaluation of the impact of Pathways Advocates to Committee, or potentially bringing the full evaluation at an earlier stage than 2025;
- (iii) to instruct the Interim Chief Officer – Education and Lifelong Learning to report back with a method for providing an overview of participation and achievements in ABZCampus; and
- (iv) to welcome and congratulate the innovative, effective outcomes reported in Phase 1 of ABZCampus and thank all staff and partners for working together positively on increasing learning opportunities for young people as Phases 2 and 3 are developed.

2023-24 EDUCATION CLIMATE CHANGE REPORT - F&C/24/118

10. The Committee had before it a report by the Interim Executive Director – Families and Communities which provided an update on some of the key events that have taken place within schools to educate children and young people about Climate Change, Biodiversity and the drive towards Net Zero during school session 2023-24. The report also outlined the work from the Youth Climate Change Group over the school session.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee –

- (a) note the summary of events that took place in schools to educate children and young people about Climate Change, Biodiversity and the drive towards Net Zero in session 2023-24;
- (b) note the work of the Youth Climate Change Group; and
- (c) instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to report back on progress through service update within one calendar year.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to request that officers invite Aberdeen for a Fairer World to either give a presentation to Committee or provide a workshop to Members;
- (ii) to note that officers were giving consideration as to how to encourage applications from all secondary schools for the roles of Youth Climate Change Presidents and Vice Presidents;
- (iii) to approve recommendations (a) and (b);

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- (iv) to instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to report back on progress via committee report within one calendar year;
- (v) to express sincere thanks to the Youth Climate Change Group and all involved in school-based green projects for their important contribution towards achieving net zero targets and environmental wellbeing;
- (vi) to instruct the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning to continue to support the Youth Climate Change Group and all environmental activities in school settings by developing the partnership work with the Hutton Institute, Keep Scotland Beautiful, Aberdeen For a Fairer World, and others and report back on progress in the above-mentioned report; and
- (vii) to agree to recommend to the Youth Climate Change Group that, in consultation with the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning, they allocate funding contained in the 2024/25 Council revenue budget, across the eleven Associated School Group (ASG) localities; with the requirement that each ASG reports back within seven months to the Interim Chief Officer - Education and Lifelong Learning with an evaluation that details how funds have been spent, comments from participating pupils and teams about the biodiversity, sustainability and outdoor learning aims that their projects have aimed to address, photographs and comments from pupils on how they think green projects and outdoor learning should develop in the future in their area and in the city.

PARENT REPRESENTATIVES

11. The Convener advised the Committee that this was the last meeting for both Mrs Cardno and Mr Crawford, who had reached the end of their tenure on the Education and Children's Services Committee as parent representatives. He added that he wished to express his sincere thanks to them both for their thorough and robust work during their time on the Committee, and their thoughtful contributions at meetings. He noted that they had been very proactive and had very effectively represented parents.

The Committee resolved:-

to concur with the remarks of the Convener.

At this juncture, the External Members of the Committee departed the meeting.

BAIRNS HOOSE - F&C/24/122

12. With reference to article 15 of the minute of its previous meeting, the Committee had before it a report by the Interim Executive Director – Families and Communities which provided an update on progress in relation to the development of Aberdeen City's Bairns Hoose.

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The report recommended:-

that the Committee –

- (a) note the update of progress and the Scottish Government grant award for 2024/25 to support delivery of Aberdeen's Bairns Hoose;
- (b) instruct the Chief Officer, Children's Social Work and Family Support / Chief Social Work Officer to provide an update on progress as appropriate during 2024/25; and
- (c) instruct the Chief Officer, Children's Social Work and Family Support / Chief Social Work Officer to arrange a visit for Elected Members to view the Bairns Hoose upon completion of the build.

The Committee resolved:-

to approve the recommendations.

- **COUNCILLOR MARTIN GREIG, Convener**