

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

SKYPE MEETING, 27 AUGUST, 2020

Present: Councillors G Owen (Chair) and R Bruce (Vice-Chair), Ms C Eade and Councillors K Adam, D Beagrie, C Buchan, S Dickinson, A Evison, M Ford, V Harper, M Ingleby, R McKail, A Simpson and J Whyte.

Apologies: Mr D Bilsland, Mrs R Paterson and Cllr L Wilson.

Officers: Director of Education and Children's Services; Head of Children's Services; Head of Education; Head of Primary Education and Curriculum Development; Head of Resources and Performance; Strategic Finance Manager; Acting Legal Services Manager (Governance); Project Manager, Children (Sharon Napier); Team Manager, Children (Morven Campbell); Team Manager, Children (Elaine Dickson); Team Manager, Children (Sara Youngson); Senior Committee Officer (Allan Bell); Senior Community Learning and Development Worker (Caithleen Bell); Area Catering Officer (Ian Paterson); Lead Officer, Child Protection Committee (Emma Toner); and Strategy Development Officer (Miranda Aitken).

In Attendance: Susan Maclaren, Chair of Aberdeenshire Child Protection Committee.

1. SEDERUNT AND DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Chair asked members if they had any interests to declare, in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. No interests were declared.

2. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

In taking decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 :-

- (1) to have due regard to the need to:-
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
- (2) to consider, where an equality impact assessment has been provided, its contents and to take those into consideration when reaching a decision.

3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE OF 28 MAY, 2020

On consideration of the circulated Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 28 May, 2020, members **approved** it as a correct record.

4. PROGRESS WITH OUTSTANDING ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

There was a circulated a report by the Director of Business Services, which updated members on progress made with actions agreed at previous meetings of the Education and Children's Services Committee held since 29 August, 2019.

After consideration, the Committee:-

- (1) **noted** the current position in respect of actions arising at previous meetings,
- (2) **agreed** that those actions which had been completed should be removed from the outstanding actions list,
- (3) **noted** that a report would be considered at a meeting of Buchan Area Committee in September and at the next meeting of the Committee in October, in respect of progress made with the relocation of Peterhead Academy and that the report on consultation regarding the proposed closure of Strachan School was now unlikely to be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee in October, and
- (4) **requested** officers to arrange a workshop on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on school pupils, especially those with additional support needs, ahead of the planned report to a future meeting of the Committee on home schooling and flexi-schooling.

5. NOTIFICATION OF USE OF DELEGATED POWERS BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES BY REASON OF SPECIAL URGENCY AND REQUESTING APPROVAL OF COMMUNITY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT "NO-ONE LEFT BEHIND" OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL GRANTS AWARD

On consideration of a circulated report by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which (1) explained the background to his exercise of delegated powers, by reason of special urgency, in respect of grant payments made between 1 April, 2020, and 31 August, 2020, from Community Learning and Development's "No-one Left Behind" Opportunities for All Grant Fund, (2) explained the background to the operation of the Fund and (3) sought approval to make further payments between 1 September, 2020, and 31 March, 2021, the Committee:-

- (1) **acknowledged** the use by the Director of Education and Children's Services of delegated powers, as provided for in an appendix to the report, in order to authorise grant funding up to a maximum value of £29,000 for the provision of Aberdeenshire Employability Agreements,

- (2) **acknowledged** the aggregated value of grant funding over the previous three financial years to Aberdeen Foyer, Lead Scotland and Barnardo's Scotland, as set out within the report, and
- (3) **approved** grant funding for the period between 1 September, 2020, and 31 March, 2021, of £9,926 to Aberdeen Foyer, £17,750 to Lead Scotland and £9,600 to Barnardo's Works, in a total of £37,276.

6. APPROVAL OF GRANT AWARD

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Education, Learning and Leisure Committee of 8 December, 2016 (Item 9), when it had been agreed to replace the Sustainability Grants Scheme with a new Key Partner Core Funding programme, there was circulated a report by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which explained the background to the award of grant funding to a number of external providers and detailed the payments which had been made in recent years.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- (1) **acknowledged** the aggregated value of grant funding made over the past three financial years to Aberdeen Foyer, Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and Lead Scotland, as specified within the report, and
- (2) **approved** grant funding for financial year 2020/2021 of £58,150 to Aberdeen Foyer, £24,900 to WEA and £23,135.83 to Lead Scotland, in a total of £99,185.83.

7. COVID-19 UPDATE

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 28 May, 2020 (Item 5), when members had been provided with an update on the work of Education and Children's Services during the Covid-19 pandemic, there was circulated a report dated 24 July, 2020, by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which (1) provided further detail on steps taken within the Service to respond to the developing Covid-19 pandemic situation, (2) detailed information in respect of the return of pupils to schools, on a full-time basis, the provision of additional funding to support staffing for schools in response to the pandemic, childcare hubs, catering, cleaning and janitorial services, and transitional arrangements for the operation of the curriculum and (3) advised members about processes put in place for vulnerable people and young children, the work of the Early Years team, the Children's Social Work Service and Live Life Aberdeenshire.

After detailed consideration, the Committee:-

- (1) **acknowledged** the ongoing response of the Service to the Covid-19 pandemic,
- (2) **noted** members' comments in respect of the remote provision of the Educational Psychology Service, ventilation in schools, Community Learning and Development, pupils who had not engaged with remote online learning, the requirement for pupils to go outwith school buildings in inclement weather, the potential provision of additional Covid-19 testing facilities for pupils and staff, parental concerns about children returning to school, the impact on town centre

trading occasioned by an absence of pupils, creative thinking for school catering provision, the Council's share of additional Scottish Government funding for staffing, Early Years 1140 provision, free bike repairs, and the cost, supply, form and wearing of face masks, and

- (3) **requested** officers to provide members with a briefing note of the phasing of additional Scottish Government funding and its allocation per local authority.

8. EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES YEAR-END PERFORMANCE MONITORING – OCTOBER, 2019 TO MARCH, 2020

With reference of the Minutes of Meetings of (1) Aberdeenshire Council of (a) 23 November, 2017 (Item 10), when approval had been given to the Council Plan 2017-2022 and (b) 23 July, 2020 (Item 4), when it had been agreed that a new Council Plan should be submitted to a future meeting of Aberdeenshire Council and (2) the Committee of (a) 17 May, 2018 (Item 7), when members had agreed the Council Plan priorities for scrutiny and (b) 21 March, 2019 (Item 18), when the Director of Education and Children's Services had been requested to submit the first performance report for 2018/2019, there was circulated a report dated 8 July, 2020, by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which provided an update on progress in relation to delivery plan actions and outcome indicators supporting the Aberdeenshire Council Plan Priorities 2017-2022, as evidenced during the reporting period of 1 October, 2019, to 31 March, 2020.

After consideration, the Committee:-

- (1) **acknowledged** progress made during the period from 1 October, 2019, to 31 March, 2020, towards achieving Council Plan Priorities 2017-2022, as referred to in appendices to the report,
- (2) **noted** the delivery plan actions and outcome indicators to be scrutinised by other policy committees, as specified within the report, and
- (3) **instructed** the Director of Education and Children's Services to continue to submit performance reports to the Committee, on a six-monthly basis, evidencing progress and performance with delivery of the Council Plan.

9. SCHOOL ROLL CAPPING – ALFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL

ITEM WITHDRAWN.

10. SCHOOL CATERING UPDATE

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 10 October, 2019 (Item 12), when, in considering a report on financial performance, members had instructed officers to report to a future meeting with further information on the provision of school meals, there was circulated a report dated 17 July, 2020, by the Director of Education and Children's Services (1) which provided members with information on recent trends pertaining to the School Catering Service over the last three years, by year group and in comparison with other Scottish local authorities, (2) which highlighted areas in which the Service might develop in future, (3) which explained the impact of the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drinks in Schools (Scotland)

Regulations 2008 and (4) to which were appended tables providing a comparison of local authority primary school meal prices across Scotland, together with the detailed financial performance for the last three years.

After consideration, the Committee:-

- (1) **noted** the contents of the report, together with members' comments in respect of the speed of the conduct of the school catering review, the inclusion of budgetary information, the production and delivery of school meals, the need to enable young people to have input into the catering review, locally-sourced produce, the Fusion app., factors impacting on the take-up of school meals, and families falling outwith the qualifying category for free school meals,
- (2) **acknowledged** challenges taking place within schools following the Scottish Government's review of the nutritional requirements for food and drink standards in schools and the revised Scottish nutritional guidelines, which were due to be implemented in April, 2021, and
- (3) **requested** officers to arrange for members to visit a secondary school to enable them to sample a school lunch, whenever pandemic conditions might permit.

11. QUARTER 1 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE – EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of Aberdeenshire Council of 18 March, 2020 (Item 5), when approval had been given to the Education and Children's Services Revenue Budget for financial year 2020/21 and the Capital Plan 2020-2035, there was circulated a report dated 7 August, 2020, by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which (1) set out the current Revenue Budget and Capital Plan monitoring positions for the Council for the first quarter of the financial year, (2) highlighted a number of issues impacting upon the Revenue Budget, in respect of administration and management, the Catering Service, the primary and secondary School Music Service, and out of authority placements, (3) outlined the impact of expenditure incurred as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, together with Capital Plan considerations and (4) highlighted a number of emerging issues, together with the actions taken to address them.

After consideration, the Committee:-

- (1) **noted** and **approved** the Revenue Budget and Capital Plan financial performance position for the first quarter of the financial year,
- (2) **approved** budget movements set out within an appendix to the report,
- (3) **noted** progress made in achieving agreed budget savings, as set out within an appendix to the report, and
- (4) **noted** the impact of the External Auditor's Interim Report of the 2019/20 Audit on future financial performance reports.

12. UPDATE ON ABERDEENSHIRE YOUNG CARER STRATEGY 2019-2020

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 21 March, 2019 (Item 5), there was circulated a report dated 2 July, 2020, by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which (1) explained that the development of a local carer strategy was a requirement of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 and that Education and Children's Services had collaborated with the Health and Social Care Partnership to develop strategies for both adult carers and young carers across Aberdeenshire, (2) advised that the implementation of the Aberdeenshire Young Carer Strategy had enabled the Council to fulfil a number of statutory duties and responsibilities, including the provision of information for, and raising awareness of, young carers, (3) outlined the financial implications arising from the development of the Strategy and (4) highlighted a number of associated themes in respect of the identification of young carers, the provision of effective support and supporting transitions into adulthood.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- (1) **acknowledged** progress made since the implementation of the Aberdeenshire Young Carer Strategy, and
- (2) **acknowledged** plans to develop and consult on the next Young Carer Strategy.

13. ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2019

There was circulated and **noted** a report dated 4 June, 2020, by the Director of Education and Children's Services, which (1) contained the 2019 annual report for the Council's Adoption Service, outlining progress made in the last year in meeting the needs of Aberdeenshire's children who require an alternative permanent family and (2) highlighted the functions of the Adoption Service.

Having **noted** members' comments regarding challenges facing the Adoption Service and support for the children of adoptive families, the Committee **agreed** to support the ongoing recruitment of adoptive families across Aberdeenshire and to provide support to all persons affected by adoption.

14. FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2019

There was circulated and **noted** a report dated 29 June, 2020, by the Director of Education and Children's Services (1) which highlighted the functions of the Council's Fostering Service in recruiting, preparing and supporting families to meet the needs of Aberdeenshire's children who require to be looked after away from home in an alternative family arrangement and (2) to which was appended a copy of the Service's annual report for 2019.

After consideration, the Committee:-

- (1) **noted** members' comments regarding foster children not in further education remaining with their foster families, support for unaccompanied children who were asylum seekers, councillors promoting fostering through social media and the achievements of foster children, and

- (2) **agreed** to continue to support the Fostering Services Skills Scheme.

15. CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT

There was circulated a report dated 17 July, 2020, by the Director of Education and Children's Services (1) which explained the background to the Council's corporate parenting responsibility, highlighted the work of the Corporate Parenting Leads' Group and outlined the Corporate Parenting Action Plan, designed to improve the service experience of Looked After Children, young people, care leavers and Care Experienced Young People and (2) to which was appended a copy of the Corporate Parenting Annual Report for 2019/20.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- (1) **acknowledged** the update contained within the Annual Report,
- (2) **noted** members' comments on the circulation of videos produced by Looked After Children, the number of people accommodated at Taizali, the percentage of Looked After Children in Aberdeenshire who had disabilities, virtual head teachers and the figures for positive destinations,
- (3) **requested** officers to submit the report to all area committees for discussion and comment, and
- (4) **agreed** to continue to support the Council's corporate parent duties by listening to the needs, fears and wishes of young people, and being proactive and determined in the collective efforts to address these.

16. ABERDEENSHIRE CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORT (1 APRIL, 2018 – 31 MARCH, 2020)

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 19 March, 2020 (Item 17), when members had noted and endorsed the partnership review of the Aberdeenshire Child Protection Committee and had agreed that the Council should continue to participate in the Partnership until at least March, 2022, there was circulated and **noted** a report dated 17 July, 2020, by the Director of Education and Children's Services (1) which explained the background to the operation of Aberdeenshire Child Protection Committee (CPC), responsible for the design, development, publication, distribution, dissemination, implementation and evaluation of child protection and domestic abuse policy and practice across the public, private and wider third sectors in the Aberdeenshire area and (2) to which was appended a copy of the CPC Progress Report for the period between 1 April, 2018, and 31 March, 2020.

After consideration, the Committee:-

- (1) **endorsed** the Aberdeenshire Child Protection Committee Progress Report, and
- (2) **agreed** to continue to support the work of the Child Protection Committee.

17. NATIONAL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK REPORT AND PLAN

Consideration was given to a circulated report dated 10 August, 2020, by the Director of Education and Children's Services (1) which explained that the National Improvement Framework (NIF) for Scottish Education provided a structured approach for delivering the national ambition of achieving excellence and equity for every child in Scotland, including addressing the poverty-related attainment gap, (2) which outlined the Framework's four key priorities for action and (3) to which were appended the Aberdeenshire NIF Report 2019/20 and the Aberdeenshire National Improvement Plan 2020/21.

After consideration, the Committee:-

- (1) **noted** the Aberdeenshire National Improvement Framework Report 2020/21 and Plan 2021/22,
- (2) **approved** the Aberdeenshire NIF Report 2019/20,
- (3) **approved** the Aberdeenshire NIF Plan 2020/21, and
- (4) **instructed** officers to amend the text to the forewords to both the 2019/20 Plan and Report, and the 2020/21 Plan, in order to explain that, due to the pandemic, there had been limited opportunity for elected members to scrutinise and comment upon those documents.

18. LITERACIES STRATEGY UPDATE

With reference to the Minutes of Meetings of the Committee of (1) 21 March, 2019 (Item 15) and (2) 5 December, 2019, when the Committee had approved the ongoing direction and development of a Literacies Strategy and had requested officers to submit a further update report to a future meeting, there was circulated a report by the Director of Education and Children's Services (1) which explained the background to the creation of the Strategy, (2) which provided an update on progress in developing the Strategy to support the improvement of key literacies and to reduce the impact of low literacy levels and (3) to which was appended the updated Literacy Strategy Action Plan.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- (1) **noted** progress with the development of a Literacies Strategy for Aberdeenshire,
- (2) **approved** the ongoing direction and development of the Strategy, and
- (3) **instructed** officers to submit a further update report on progress, together with a first draft of the Literacies Strategy, to a meeting of the Committee during 2021.