

# ANGUS COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the **CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE** hosted at Angus House, Orchardbank Business Park, Forfar and held remotely on Tuesday 17 November 2020 at 2.00 pm.

**Present:** Councillors DEREK WANN, LOIS SPEED, JULIE BELL, KENNY BRAES, COLIN BROWN BEM, LYNNE DEVINE, BILL DUFF, BEN LAWRIE, MARK SALMOND, ALEX KING, BOB MYLES, CRAIG FOTHERINGHAM, TOMMY STEWART, DAVID LUMGAIR and BETH WHITESIDE.

## **Church**

**Representative:** Miss LESLEY HOOD.

Councillor WANN, Convener, in the Chair.

### **1. APOLOGIES/SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Councillors Angus MacMillan Douglas OBE, Ronnie Proctor MBE and Ron Sturrock, with Councillors Mark Salmond, Craig Fotheringham and David Lumgair substituting respectively. Apologies for absence were also intimated on behalf of Mrs Liz Howson and Mr Eric Summers, Church Representatives.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

### **3. MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minute of meeting of this Committee of 22 September 2020 was approved as a correct record and signed by the Convener.

At this stage in the meeting, the Convener, on behalf of the Committee, paid tribute to the teachers, pupils and all staff concerned in providing vital services during the pandemic.

### **4. PRESENTATION: BEFRIENDING SCHEME**

The Convener welcomed Mrs Ritchie, Depute Head Teacher and Nadya, Eve, Louisa and Lucy, pupils of Monifieth High School who provided an overview of their involvement with the Monifieth Befriending Scheme, a well established partnership that the school had with them and the positive impact that the scheme had on all involved. One of the school's main priorities was community and the befriending scheme was a hugely successful example of how the school had built links with the local community.

The scheme had been in place for a number of years and aimed to tackle loneliness in some socially isolated groups in the community, with a number of senior pupils volunteering to participate in the scheme.

Nadya, Eve, Louisa and Lucy each provided details of their own involvement with the scheme, what they had gained from it, the challenges that they had faced during the current pandemic and that despite the challenges, they had found ways to keep in touch with their friends through the scheme. An article on the Scheme had also featured in Woman and Home magazine.

Following questions and answers, the Convener and members of the Committee praised all those involved in the fantastic project and thanked the pupils and Mrs Ritchie for their presentation and attendance.

### **5. INFORMATION REPORT FOR THE PERIOD 8 SEPTEMBER TO 3 NOVEMBER 2020**

There was submitted Joint Report No 275/20 by the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning and the Director of Children, Families & Justice providing key information to members with regards to services in the Education & Lifelong Learning Service and the Children, Families & Justice Service for the period 8 September to 3 November 2020 relating to:-

- Equal Protection from Assault (Schedule 1), and
- Monifieth Learning Estate (Schedule 2).

Having heard Councillor Speed welcome the implementation of the Act (Schedule 1) and seek further information with regard to the support and advice available to parents and carers, and Councillor Whiteside in relation to the consultation period for the Monifieth Learning Estate (Schedule 2), the Committee agreed to note the contents of the Report.

## **6. ANNUAL EDUCATION REPORT 2019-2020 AND ANNUAL EDUCATION PLAN 2020-2021**

With reference to Article 6 of the minute of meeting of this Committee of 17 September 2019, there was submitted Report No 276/20 by the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning presenting the annual education report and plan, summarising the progress made with regard to the education plan, and setting out the new plan for school session 2020-2021.

The Report indicated that the review of progress was for the period up to 24 March 2020, the date of school closure due to Covid-19, and captured the work of the Education and Lifelong Directorate from the point of school closure in March up to August 2020.

The education plan was for the period up to 31 May 2021 to allow all subsequent plans to align with the local improvement planning process. The plan was designed to respond to the needs of our children, young people, families and staff following the period of school closure and the impact of the changes to our lives due to Covid-19. The health and wellbeing of all, a focus on the recovery of any 'loss of learning' in reading, the development of the digital learning offer and the quality of support provided to our care experienced children and young people had been prioritised.

The plan for session 2019-2020 highlighted planned educational improvement activity for the period 1 September 2020 to 31 May 2021 with a Report on progress being brought back to a meeting of this Committee in September 2021.

Having heard a number of members welcome the positive Report, and pay tribute to the children and young people, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the progress summarised in relation to the Annual Education Plan 2019-2020, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the Report;
- (ii) to approve the Annual Education Plan 2020-2021, and implementation of the plan and its priorities, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the Report;
- (iii) to instruct provision of the approved Plan to Scottish Ministers, as required in Section 3F(2) of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000;
- (iv) to note that the Annual Education Plan outlined improvement activity for the period 1 September 2020 to 31 August 2021; and
- (v) to instruct the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning to present an evaluation Report on progress with the Annual Education Plan to a meeting of this Committee in September 2021.

## **7. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN ANGUS – REPORT 2017-2020**

There was submitted Report No 277/20 by the Depute Chief Executive presenting the first Children's Rights in Angus report and, in line with national guidance on children's rights reporting, highlighted the work taking place and areas where further work was planned.

The Report indicated that as a local authority, there was a duty to ensure that our children and young people knew their rights and that the work carried out to support and protect young people was grounded in a children's rights approach. The first Angus children's rights report showed the work being done in partnership with children and young people and with other agencies and partners to ensure protection from bullying, participation in decision making and the protection and promotion of family relationships.

The first children's rights in Angus report also put the Council in a good position in working towards the full incorporation of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as set out in the UNCRC (Incorporation)(Scotland) Bill, and further consideration

would be given to what was required to support its implementation, including assessing the financial implications as it progressed through the parliamentary process.

Having heard from Councillors Speed and Bell, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note and endorse the work in Angus to raise awareness of and give effect to, children's rights;
- (ii) to approve the first Angus Children's Rights Report, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the Report, and to note that it would be submitted to Scottish Government; and
- (iii) to note the current progress of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill.

## **8. TEMPORARY AMENDED OPERATING HOURS AT STRATHMORE CENTRE**

There was submitted Report No 278/20 by the Director of Children, Families & Justice setting out proposals to continue the amended operating hours for Strathmore Centre.

The Report indicated that the Centre was a part-time residential respite centre for children and young people with complex and profound disabilities. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the centre had been closed from March to June 2020 when the Chief Social Work Officer, under her delegated power 10a (viii), "to take final decisions binding on the Council in relation to a range of social work services provided by statute", agreed that the Centre could re-open and operate on a full-time basis between July and October in order to provide ongoing, critical care respite to families as part of their self-directed support packages. This support had been vital to allow families to continue in their caring roles and would not have been possible without operating on a full-time basis as a result of the impact of infection control measures. The current temporary operating model had worked well since July and staff had accommodated and continued to lend their support to the rota changes implemented to support the extended operating hours model.

In order to continue to be able to offer residential respite to the maximum number of children and young people, whilst complying with the necessary infection control guidance, it was proposed that the Strathmore Centre continued to be open on a full-time basis from the date of this Committee until 31 January 2021.

Having heard Councillors Speed and Devine welcome the proposal, and praise the staff of the Strathmore Centre, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the decision of the Chief Social Work Officer, using her delegated powers, to re-open and operate the Strathmore Centre on a full-time basis between July and October 2020 following its closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- (ii) to approve the continued full-time operation of the Strathmore Centre from the date of this Committee until 31 January 2021; and
- (iii) to note the work undertaken to support children and families during the Covid-19 pandemic and the flexibility shown by staff in delivering services.

## **9. HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY**

With reference to Article 6 of the minute of meeting of this Committee of 19 April 2018, there was submitted Report No 279/20 by the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning outlining an updated policy statement and accompanying documents for home to school transport for children and young people in Angus.

The Report indicated that following the introduction of the appeals process in 2018, further work had been carried out to review and refine the existing Home to School Transport Policy. Work was currently underway to further automate the application process, including an investigation into the feasibility of the appeals process going online. Should an online appeals process be developed then a further minor change would be required to the policy statement, and it was proposed that authorisation be given to the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning to enable this change to be made without the requirement for a further report to Committee.

Having heard from a number of members, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to approve the updated policy statement and accompanying documents as detailed in the Appendix to the Report; and
- (ii) to authorise the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning to make further minor amendments to the policy statement without the need for Committee approval.

## **10. FUNDED EARLY LEARNING & CHILDCARE FRAMEWORK COSTS REVIEW**

With reference to Article 6 of the minute of meeting of this Committee of 5 November 2019, there was submitted Report No 280/20 by the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning providing information with regard to the increased costs of delivering funded early learning and childcare (ELC) in the context of COVID-19, and seeking approval to implement a process for increased financial support to contracted providers of this service.

The Report indicated that national guidance on the safe provision of ELC during the ongoing pandemic required providers to implement a range of measures such as enhanced cleaning of surfaces, increased outdoor play and learning, and physical distancing between groups of children where possible, and the Scottish Government had made additional funding available to offset some of the costs. In Angus, an additional grant scheme had also been implemented for childminders. In addition to these grants, a commitment was made to review providers' additional costs to ensure that the remuneration available through the framework continued to be enough to provide safe, high quality ELC and a consultation was therefore undertaken. The results of the consultation were summarised in Appendix 1 to the Report. It was clear that the varying capacities, staffing structures and accommodation types across the framework meant that the measures required affected each provider differently and it was clear therefore that a blanket increase to the hourly rates on the framework would not be the most appropriate method of administering additional financial support. Instead, a process which allowed the council to continuously review costs throughout the ongoing pandemic, and to provide reimbursement for actual costs accrued, would ensure a more effective use of funds, with the implementation of a quarterly grant scheme proposed.

The Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the results of the consultation exercise undertaken to assess the ongoing additional costs of delivering funded ELC in the context of COVID-19;
- (ii) to approve the implementation of a quarterly grant scheme to provide financial support to providers of funded ELC in Angus throughout the first year of the framework agreement; and
- (iii) to note that the cost and funding implications of the scheme would be reviewed as part of the upcoming budget setting process, taking account of any emerging COVID-19 information/guidance to ensure sustainability of the scheme.

## **11. SCHOOL TERMS AND HOLIDAYS 2022-2025**

With reference to Article 13 of the minute of meeting of this Committee of 13 June 2017, there was submitted Report No 281/20 by the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning seeking approval for a consultation exercise on proposals for the 2022/2023, 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 school terms and holiday dates.

The Report indicated that it was the duty of the Council to set a schedule of school terms and holiday dates. These dates must be set following consultation and had to comprise a total pupil school year of 190 days, unless exceptional circumstances applied. In addition, the Council had to set aside five days within the school year for the purposes of in-service training for staff.

It was therefore proposed that a consultation exercise be undertaken inviting comments on the specific issues detailed in paragraph 5 of the Report. It was also proposed that all Primary 1 pupils attend full-time from the start of the of the August 2021 school session.

The Committee agreed:-

- (i) to authorise a consultation exercise on the draft schedule of school terms and holiday dates for sessions 2022/2023, 2023/2024 and 2024/2025, as detailed in the Appendices to the Report;

- (ii) to note that the outcomes of the consultation exercise would be the subject of a future Report to this Committee; and
- (iii) to approve an amendment to the published dates for 2021-2022 to remove reference to Primary 1 pupil attendance in August 2021.

## **12. EDUCATION RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE UPDATE**

With reference to Article 13 of the minute of meeting of Angus Council of 10 September 2020, there was submitted Report No 282/20 by the Director of Education & Lifelong Learning providing an update on the response and recovery process for Angus schools and early learning and childcare settings following the resumption of full-time attendance in August.

The Report provided detailed information in terms of early learning and childcare, primary and secondary schools, additional teachers and support staff, digital learning and teaching, support for children and families, and also provided information in terms of the latest financial position, and the costs associated within each of the areas.

The Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note the general update provided regarding the return of schools and early learning and childcare settings, as detailed in Sections 4.1-4.20 of the Report; and
- (ii) to note the updated financial information as detailed in Sections 6.1-6.4 of the Report.