

**MINUTE**  
**of**  
**EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**Minute of virtual meeting held at 10.00am on 1 October 2020.**

**Present:**

Councillor Paul O’Kane (Chair)	Councillor Gordon Wallace
Councillor Colm Merrick (Vice Chair)	Dr Frank Angell
Councillor Caroline Bamforth	Ms Dorothy Graham
Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)	Ms Mary McIntyre
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	Mr Des Morris
Councillor Alan Lafferty	

Councillor O’Kane in the Chair

**Attending:**

Mhairi Shaw, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Fiona Morrison, Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources); Mark Ratter, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance); Graeme Hay, Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change); Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager (Developing People); Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer; and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**1385.** There were no declarations of interest intimated.

**NATIONAL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK**

**1386.** The committee considered a report by the Director of Education providing an update on the department’s progress in implementing priorities associated with the National Improvement Framework (NIF) for Scottish Education. A copy of the evidence report submitted to Education Scotland accompanied the report.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that the NIF had been introduced in January 2016, was intended to drive both excellence and equity in Scottish education, and was reviewed annually. The 2020 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan had been published in December 2019. The priorities set out in the NIF mirrored the department’s own aspirations as set out in its various plans and encapsulated in its vision of ‘*Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving through Excellent Experiences*’.

The annual Standards and Quality Report provided evidence of the progress the department and schools had made with the activities set out in the Local Improvement Plan and the progress that had been made towards the four national priorities set out in the NIF, these being listed in the report.

It was explained that Education Scotland had been tasked with gathering some of the data used by the Scottish Government to evidence how effectively the activity set out in NIF was bringing about improvement across Scotland. Part of this information included asking local authorities to provide high level, evidence based, evaluative comments for key themes associated with the NIF and National Improvement Plan. Given the context this year, local authorities had also been asked to provide an overview of the initial response to supporting children, families and school communities through the COVID-19 crisis. A copy of the Council's response was attached as an appendix to the report.

Overall, the department had made strong progress in implementing the priorities associated with the NIF. Key highlights included, amongst others, improvements in literacy and numeracy attainment in the Senior Phase and the proportion of leavers attaining vocational qualifications and in positive destinations. The department remained focused on further improvement and details were provided of some of the ways in which it was seeking to do this along with details in relation to the initial response to COVID-19 and the need to address the loss of learning as a result of the extended closure of schools in line with emergency legislation.

In response to Councillor Wallace who sought clarification of the term "new experiences" in relation to addressing gaps in the progress of learners as a result of the extended closure of schools, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that the department was focussing strongly on recovery linked to all areas of the curriculum across all sectors of the school population. The Director, by way of example, explained that pupils had commented positively on the increased use of digital alternatives to traditional methods of learning and teaching which made for a more exciting experience both within the classroom and remotely online, and welcomed the increased focus on health and wellbeing. She explained that the department intended to continue to make use of the additional skills that staff had developed during the period of lockdown to make a difference to teaching within schools with a view to enhancing the overall learning experience.

Councillor Merrick welcomed the improvements in literacy and numeracy and also the further closing of the attainment gap. In relation to the increase in the proportion of leavers attaining vocational qualifications and in positive destinations, he expressed the view that, given the economic impact of COVID-19, maintaining this increase in future may prove to be more difficult to achieve. In response, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that the department held regular meetings with representatives of Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to discuss the situation. Referring to the Scottish Government's proposed Youth Guarantee Scheme, he explained that the department would work closely with SDS and the Council's Economic Development Team to maximise the availability and uptake of opportunities such as coaching and life skills and modern apprenticeships.

Councillor Bamforth welcomed the work being done to close the poverty related attainment gap and noted the considerable increase in the number of vulnerable children and young people who had attended the learning hubs. She also commended the use of the "Kitbag" resource designed to improve mental health and wellbeing and encourage young people to reflect on their feelings and emotions. The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that the resource had been developed in conjunction with the Family Wellbeing Service and expressed the view that it had been successful in strengthening relationships within families and between children in schools.

Responding to Councillor Wallace who sought further information on the reading recovery activity referred to, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that initially 2 teachers had been trained to deliver the scheme and that they had gone on to train a number of teachers in every school across the authority. Reading recovery teaching was undertaken across all schools from primary through to the senior sector.

Following further brief discussion, the committee agreed to note the Education Department's progress in implementing priorities associated with the National Improvement Framework.

## **ACCESS TO COUNSELLING IN EAST RENFREWSHIRE SCHOOLS**

**1387.** The committee considered a report by the Director of Education providing an update of the department's interim arrangements for access to counselling in East Renfrewshire schools.

The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that in July 2019 the Scottish Government had made a commitment to fund local authorities to the sum of £12m to support delivery of the access to school counselling services. The delivery of a Youth Counselling service was designed to support children and young people more efficiently and effectively with issues affecting their mental health and wellbeing and to help school staff to engage children and young people with appropriate support services from within their local communities and at an early stage.

The Scottish Government and local authority leaders had agreed a partnership approach to the delivery of counselling services with clear aims and principles, including access to counselling through primary, secondary and special schools, ensuring consistently high quality services available locally for pupils aged 10 and over. In response to the commitment from the Scottish Government to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, a co-production event was held in November 2019 to explore the design of the new service. Details of the stakeholders and invited guests who had attended the event and the focus of the workshop were outlined in the report and a full record of the workshop was attached as an appendix to the report.

It was explained that unfortunately, COVID-19 had delayed the procurement process and the department was unable to provide the service as designed by the stakeholder group on time. The procurement process had however recently commenced and the department was on schedule to introduce its 'Healthier Minds Service' in early 2021. The service would complement the Healthier Minds Framework described in the report.

In response to this delay, senior officers from the department had met with staff and pupils to discuss alternative interim arrangements for session 2020/21 and details of these arrangements and the introduction of a Recovery Team were outlined in the report. These interim arrangements would be available for the academic session 2020/21, overlapping with the new Healthier Minds Service when it was introduced in 2021.

Councillor Bamforth welcomed the report and in particular the commitment of the department to ensure adequate training for teachers, some of which could take up to 12 months.

Responding to requests from a number of members seeking clarification around the process of referring children and young people to the service, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity), supported by the Director, explained that there were a number of routes through which referrals could be made including from parents, teachers, and through self-referral with the latter being the most frequently used method. The high percentage of self-referrals highlighted the increased awareness of mental health and wellbeing amongst young people and indicated that the stigma around mental health and wellbeing was rapidly reducing.

Councillor O’Kane welcomed the report and the increased focus on mental health and wellbeing and expressed the view that it was vitally important to continue to work towards improving the mental wellbeing of children and young people.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to note the department’s interim arrangements for access to counselling in schools for session 2020/21.

## **EDUCATION DEPARTMENT YEAR END REPORT 2019/20**

**1388.** The committee considered a report by the Director of Education informing members of the year end performance of the Education Department for 2019/20. The report was based on performance indicators in the Outcome Delivery Plan 2019-2022 which had been approved by the Council in June 2019. Detailed performance results were attached as an appendix to the report.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that the detailed results contained in the appendix to the report were set out under the ODP outcomes along with customer, efficiency and people organisers. Performance indicators for school attainment, attendance, and exclusions reflected academic year 2018/19 and members would be provided with updates in relation to the 2019/20 performance at future meetings of the committee.

The information presented in the report showed a very positive picture overall with key strengths highlighted including, amongst others, very good performance in terms of attainment, exclusions and leaver destinations; very high satisfaction levels with the Council’s schools as expressed in the Citizens’ Panel results and through parental questionnaires; and progress, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with capital projects designed to cater for the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) to 1140 hours. Areas for further improvement were also noted.

Councillor Wallace sought clarification on the deterioration in the percentage of invoices paid within the agreed 30 day period as this matter had recently been discussed by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee. In response, the Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources) confirmed that the introduction of the Integra financial management system had initially impacted the timely payment of invoices but that major improvements were now being seen. The situation was also exacerbated by the mismatch between the financial year and the academic year.

Responding to Councillor Wallace who expressed concern at the level of absenteeism amongst local government staff within the department, the Education Senior Manager (Developing People) explained that the figures tended to reflect the demographic profile of that particular workforce in that it was made up of a high proportion of older, mainly female, employees. She went on to explain that the number of long-term health-related absences had since reduced considerably, that those remaining were being fully supported by the Council’s HR team, and that the department was now within the top 10 for teaching staff absence when compared to other local authorities.

Councillor Merrick welcomed the reduction in the attainment gap highlighted in the report. He went on to express the view that, in light of teaching staff being clearly in the “front line” with respect to COVID-19, the absenteeism figures for 2020/21 would require to be carefully monitored. In response to this, and also to a comment from Councillor Bamforth regarding the need to support the mental health and wellbeing of teachers, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity), supported by the Director, explained that the Educational Psychology

team had produced a series of resources, including a video, aimed specifically at teaching staff which was used by all schools on the in-service days in August. Mr Morris explained that the EIS and other trades unions were aware of the issue of mental health and wellbeing and welcomed the support being provided by the department and by HR in this regard.

Councillor Buchanan welcomed an excellent report with particular reference to the improving performance relating to the payment of invoices as it was the aim of the Council to ensure that money due to local suppliers was made available as quickly as possible in order to support local employers and, through them, the wider local economy.

Having heard Councillor O’Kane welcome the report and highlight the challenges facing the Council as an already high-performing authority, the committee approved the report as a summary of the Education Department’s year end performance for 2019/20.

### **WEST PARTNERSHIP IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVE - REPORT ON REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2019/20**

**1389.** The committee considered a report by the Director of Education informing of the evaluation of work undertaken by the West Partnership of the Glasgow Region Education Improvement Collaborative during 2019/20. A copy of the report on the progress with and impact of the Improvement Plan 2019/20 was included as an appendix to the report.

The Director explained that the report had been brought to the committee to maintain democratic oversight of education at a local authority level and to fulfil the department’s duty to bring about improvement in its schools while working collaboratively where that was beneficial to the partner education authorities and their schools.

She went on to report that progress had been adversely affected by COVID-19 but in spite of this a number of key highlights were set out including, amongst others, almost 3200 participants attending a West Partnership event over the last year; 700 practitioners attending the “Early Learning and Childcare Festival”; more than 700 people subscribing to the quarterly newsletter; and more than 3500 followers on Twitter. Specific COVID-19 related activities included a Remote Learning research paper being viewed by over 11,000 people and more than 700 practitioners participating in a series of seminars on Remote Learning.

She concluded by explaining that the report had been endorsed by the Regional Education Committee on 8 September and would be submitted to both Education Scotland and the Scottish Government in due course.

Councillor Wallace questioned the use of the phrase “blended learning” in the report expressing the view that what had been delivered during lockdown had not been blended learning but simply remote learning. In response the Director explained that blended learning was now regarded by many as a tarnished brand and that high quality remote learning would continue to be developed as a key resource that could be employed in any situation where a school required to close, even for a short period, in order to allow children and young people to continue their education uninterrupted.

Responding to Councillor Bamforth who sought clarification regarding diversity training for teachers and the apparent lowering of a key target relating to the percentage of leavers achieving 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 or better, the Director explained that it had been recognised that there was a lack of representation from black and minority ethnic (BAME) groups throughout the teaching profession and the training referred to was aimed at promoting teaching as a profession to members of that community in order to better reflect the population mix. The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that

many of the targets contained in the report were currently being reviewed to ensure that they remained ambitious but realistic.

Councillor Wallace sought further clarification regarding what the department considered to be the benefits to East Renfrewshire of the Partnership. In response, the Director, supported by the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance), explained that prior to the Partnership there had been a perception within East Renfrewshire schools that there was little they could learn from the experiences of others. However, it was now the view that local schools were more outward looking and that staff at all levels were enthused by wider partnership working and much more willing to put into practice learning developed by other areas.

Councillor Buchanan welcomed the report which highlighted some of the outstanding work being done by the Partnership.

Having heard Councillor O’Kane echo the comments made by Councillor Buchanan and others, commend the input to the work of the Partnership by East Renfrewshire staff, and welcome the opportunity for local democratic scrutiny of the Partnership’s work, the committee noted the report.

### **WEST PARTNERSHIP IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVE - IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2020 - 2023**

**1390.** The committee considered a report by the Director of Education on the West Partnership’s Improvement Plan 2020 – 2023.

The Director explained that the plan had been streamlined and amendments made in relation to the ongoing pandemic and the Partnership’s collective response and recovery from it. There were now three workstreams which research showed were key to bringing about improvement in schools. These were Collaborative Learning Networks; Curriculum, Learning and Teaching; and Leadership, Empowerment and Improvement.

She concluded by explaining that the plan had been presented to and endorsed by the Regional Education Committee on 8 September and would be presented to the City Region Cabinet on 6 October.

As with the preceding item, this report had been brought to the committee to maintain democratic oversight of the Council’s education functions.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to note the report.

### **VALEDICTORY – MHAIRI SHAW, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

**1391.** Councillor O’Kane advised the Committee that this would be the last meeting attended by Mhairi Shaw, Director of Education, who was retiring from the Council.

He briefly outlined her contribution to education within East Renfrewshire over a period of 19 years and expressed his personal thanks to her for the help and support she had always given him in his role as Vice-Convener and, latterly, as Convener for Education.

Mrs Shaw responded in appropriate terms, in the course of which she expressed the view that her 19 years in East Renfrewshire had been some of the most rewarding of her career. She commended the senior management team that had supported her and also the strong

partnership working which existed across the entire Council and she praised Elected Members for their continued prioritisation of education.

She concluded by commending her successor, Dr Ratter, to the committee.

CHAIR

