

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE held via MS Teams on
Tuesday, 18th January, 2022 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors M. Rowley (Chairman), S. Aitchison, G. Edgar, E. Jardine,
C. Hamilton, S. Hamilton, S. Haslam, J. Linehan, S. Mountford, R. Tatler,
G. Turnbull and T. Weatherston.

In Attendance:- Chief Executive Officer, Director Education & Lifelong Learning, Director
Finance & Corporate Governance, Democratic Services Team Leader,
Democratic Services Officer (D. Hall)

EDUCATION BUSINESS

Present: - Mr I. Topping, Eleanor Lockey (Pupil Representative)

CHAIRMAN

Councillor C Hamilton chaired the meeting for consideration of Education Business.

1. **LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY – COP26 AND BEYOND**

1.1 Debbie Matthewson, Principal Teacher of Stow Primary School and Learning for Sustainability Development Officer, joined the meeting to make a presentation on Learning for Sustainability and COP26. Ms Matthewson explained that P2-7 pupils from her school had taken part in an event at Strathclyde University Student Union on 2 November, working with Daydream Believers, Lego, Pecha Kucha, Whitespace, Ellen McArthur Foundation and Napier University prior to and during the event. All of the pupils who attended had performed a rap, song and poem highlighting the necessity for climate action, whilst the pupils from P6/7 used Pecha Kucha to share their own presentations. A group of the students that had been involved in the project joined the meeting, explained how they had taken part and answered questions from Members. Members thanked the pupils for attending the meeting and congratulated them on their outstanding impact and achievements.

1.2 Ms Matthewson outlined further developments in the Local Authority regarding sustainable learning. The review and feedback from primary schools that were part of a recycling pilot with Levenseat was imminent. Discussions were ongoing with 9 primary and 2 high schools over a multi service pilot with Scottish Borders Council catering and cleaning to reduce food waste and recycle properly. Ms Matthewson undertook to send out information on the Dandelion Festival, one of Scotland's largest food growing initiatives. Members thanked Ms Matthewson for her presentation and congratulated her on her outstanding work.

DECISION

NOTED the presentation.

2. **EDUCATION ATTAINMENT 2020-21**

2.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by Director, Education and Lifelong Learning informing the Committee of the progress schools were making in the Broad General Education for P1 to P7 and Senior Phase S4-6 Scottish Qualification (SQA) examinations for session 2020-21. Academic session 2020-21 was unique with further school closures across Scotland as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. As well as a second period of extended home learning, all SQA examinations were cancelled and replaced with an Alternative Certification Model (ACM). Digital solutions to ensure excellent home learning

through the Inspire Learning Programme were adopted. Staff across the Education department worked hard to provide high quality learning for children and support for families, whilst up-skilling themselves at pace. In the Broad General Education (P1-S3) attainment data in literacy and numeracy was submitted to the Scottish Government annually, reporting the percentage of pupils in P1, P4, P7 and S3 whom had achieved the national benchmarks. Due to the impact of Covid-19 there was no requirement to report the data in session 2019/20 and only for P1, P4 and P7 in session 2020/21. The data for 2020/21 showed a decline across both literacy and numeracy at all levels.

- 2.2 The Senior Phase SQA exam results for 2020 were part of the attainment journey in the Scottish Borders for pupils in S4-S6. The exam diet of 2020/21 was suspended due to Covid-19 and an alternative model was put in place by the SQA across all schools in Scotland. The ACM required a bespoke approach by secondary schools to validate their evidence gathered to confirm levels of attainment in the senior phase. A seconded secondary depute Head Teacher led the work for the Scottish Borders, supported by 28 subject leads who led moderation sessions from January to May 2021. The approach to moderation was externally validated as robust and reliable by Education Scotland. The Education Service would give a further update to the Executive Committee on attainment and achievement in March 2022 when all the data was available for leavers from May 2021. The number of presentations across the Scottish Borders was consistent with 2021, with approximately 6,000 at National 5, approximately 4,000 at Higher and 620 at Advanced Higher. Schools continued to accredit a broad range of subjects and qualifications at the more challenging SCQF Level 5 award, with an increase of young people gaining qualifications at SCQF Levels 1-3.
- 2.3 Members discussed the report and recognised the unique and unprecedented circumstances that Education staff had worked under throughout the pandemic. Members in particular highlighted that positive destination statistics were positive despite the enormous pressures faced by all teachers and learners across the country. In response to a question on how primary school students in the region compared to national averages in reading and writing, Ms Christian Robertson, Senior Lead Officer, explained that measures were in place to allow teachers to focus on specific areas where learners had performed less well in order to address those areas, and that early indications pointed to progress being made. Regarding school clubs and associations, Ms Catherine Thomson, Senior Lead Officer, explained that schools recognised that participation in extracurricular activities contributed to wider achievement, and that tracking of participation and looking to remove barriers to involvement in activities was ongoing to try and ensure that young people could take part in the activities they were interested in. In response to a question regarding what work had gone on to help school leavers transition from school to an increasingly online based workplace, Ms Thomson explained that the educational focus was on providing core skills and developing independence to ensure that the transition would be as smooth as possible. Members thanked officers for their time and the report.

DECISION

NOTED:-

- (a) **the trends and progress that schools are making, in the Broad General Education and Senior Phase, in terms of attainment and the identified areas for improvement; and**
 - (b) **the intention to bring the Equity Strategy for Education to the Committee in the near future.**
3. **PROPOSAL TO INCREASE THE HOURLY RATE PAID BY SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL TO FUNDED EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE PROVIDERS**
- This item was withdrawn from consideration to allow data in the report to be updated in light of information received since the report was published. The report would be updated and presented to a future meeting

OTHER BUSINESS

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Rowley chaired the meeting for the remainder of the meeting.

4. MINUTE

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the meeting held on 7 December 2021.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

5. CORPORATE DEBTS - WRITE OFFS IN 2021/22 MID YEAR UPDATE

With reference to paragraph 2 of the Minute of the meeting held on 1 December 2020, there had been circulated copies of report by the Director, Finance and Corporate Governance detailing the aggregate amounts of debt written off during the first months of 2021/22 under delegated authority. The report covered the areas of Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates, Sundry Debtors, Housing Benefit Overpayments and aged debt from the balance sheet. The total value of write-offs between 1 April 2021 and 30 September 2021 was £212.1k. The Director, Finance & Corporate Governance, Mr David Robertson, presented the report, highlighted that debts were only written off when they were considered unrecoverable, that where new information arose a debt would be written back on, and that work on debt recovery had been impacted by Covid related recovery work. In response to a question, Mr Robertson acknowledged an error in the dates within Table 1. In response to questions from the Chairman, the Director explained that a full picture of write offs would be available at the end of the financial year, that levels of write offs were relatively low and that the Council compared broadly favourably to its family group of Councils.

DECISION

NOTED the debtor balances written off under delegated authority for the period 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021.

The meeting concluded at 12.10 pm