



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

CHILDREN'S SERVICES MEMBER OFFICER WORKING GROUP

Minute of Meeting held in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Stornoway and through Microsoft Teams on Tuesday, 11 February 2025 at 10.00am.

PRESENT

Mr Paul Finnegan (Chair)
Mr Mustapha Hocine (Vice-Chair)
Mr Calum Maclean
Dr Frances Murray
Mr Angus McCormack
Mr Rae Mackenzie

Mr Malcolm Burr
Ms Anne Macleod
Mr Calum Mackenzie
Mr Iain G Smith
Mr Jack Libby
Mr Maxwell Smart

MINUTES

Appointment of
Chair and Vice
Chair

1. It was **agreed** to appoint Mr Paul Finnegan as Chair of the Children's Services Member Officer Working Group.

It was **agreed** to appoint Mr Mustapha Hocine as Vice-Chair of the Children's Services Member Officer Working Group.

Current Provision
and Service
Delivery Model

2. The Children's Services Resources Manager provided a summary overview of the current provision and service delivery model for residential care placements for children and young people in the Outer Hebrides. It was noted that a mixed model of care is used to meet need; Hillcrest is a residential home based in Stornoway for care experienced children and young people with a Short Breaks service for those with additional needs; Rowantree House provides residential short break care to young people, aged between zero to 18 years; some respite provision is provided within communities across the islands; some children and young people require off-island mainland specialist residential care; self-directed support, where a person/ family take responsibility for managing their own support arrangements is also utilised across the islands.

Section 23 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 places a duty on local authorities to assess the needs of children considered 'in need' particularly those with disabilities, and to provide necessary support services to minimise the impact of their disability on them and their families. Resource Panels are used within Children's Services to determine need and often require significant budgetary outlay to meet need. Residential care and outreach needs in the islands continue to outstrip existing provision.

The Chief Officer, Children's Services (Chief Social Work Officer) noted that Hillcrest has the capacity for 4 placements plus one additional placement for short-breaks. Funding is in place for 3 placements, plus the short-break bed. Budgetary provision allows for 150 short-break nights per-annum at Hillcrest. In comparison, the Orkney Islands has a facility which provides provision for 5 short-break beds, and the Shetland Islands has provision for 6 short-break beds.

The Chief Officer, Children's Services noted that where specialist care is not available in the Outer Hebrides, some children and young people require mainland residential placements to meet their needs.

This places children and young people away from their family, friends and community. It was noted that the current costs for specialist mainland residential care is c.£820 - £850 per day, and that there has been a continued trend of costs increasing.

In discussion, it was noted that the number of children and young people from the Outer Hebrides who require specialist residential care on the mainland had reduced by two-thirds over the past 15-years. It was noted that the significant progress made in this area had been facilitated through changes in culture, and by the direct supports offered to families through more sophisticated approaches to ensuring needs are met. Investment had been made across the Extended Learning Resource to support children, young people and families, and to meet additional support needs through inclusion in school settings, although the overall resource has significantly reduced in real terms due to recurring efficiency savings within the ELR Service.

It was noted that there has been an increase in the number of children and young people who require additional support needs in school provision over the past 15-years, but that the number of children and young people with severe and complex needs had remained at a relatively stable level.

It was agreed to note the update.

Scope of the
Proposed Project

3. Discussion was held in relation to scoping options for a residential care home for children affected by disability in the Outer Hebrides. The Chief Officer, Children's Services noted that the proposed project would accommodate 5 beds (3 residential beds and 2 short-break beds, with a level of flexibility for change) and would offer 52-week placements for a small number of children with severe and complex needs (who would otherwise be required to live in specialist mainland provision) and short-breaks for a larger number of children (overnight/ multi-night stays every 4-6 weeks).

It was noted that the proposed development of a dedicated residential care home for children would not impact on the work already being carried out within Hillcrest. The new facility would allow children and young people to remain in the Outer Hebrides in place of moving to mainland residential care. It is proposed to meet anticipated workforce need through multiple sources, including the existing skilled workforce, recruitment, up-skilling, training and modern apprentices. The facility will require a mixture of skills and disciplines to meet needs.

The Chief Officer, Assets and Infrastructure noted that support would be available through the Comhairle's Technical Service and Housing Service teams to support Children's Services in relation to the potential development of a residential care home for children affected by disabilities, but there is a need for further scoping, and identification of suitable sites.

It is intended that the Chief Officer, Children's Services and the Children's Services Resources Manager will undertake visits to residential care facilities in the Orkney Islands, and the Shetland Islands as part of scoping for the project, but there is currently no budgetary provision to facilitate this. Funding will also be required to develop initial design works.

It was agreed to note the update.

Location of the
Development

4. The Chief Officer, Children's Services indicated that it is anticipated that the physical footprint of the care home will be based within Stornoway; work is ongoing to identify suitable land for any development within this area. In discussion, it was recognised that there is a need to consider how children and young people in Uist and Barra could be supported, including options and opportunities for dedicated residential provision as part of planned major development in Castlebay. The Chief Officer, Children's Services noted that the development of a residential care home in Stornoway for children with severe and complex needs could be a support/ catalyst for further initiatives across the islands.

Discussion was held in relation to potential locations for the care home within the Stornoway area. The Chief Officer, Children's Services submitted a Letter to the Chief Executive, Hebridean Housing Partnership which detailed the proposal to develop a residential care home for children affected by disabilities in Stornoway which sought

consideration to include the development of a care home within planned housing developments at Mackenzie Park in Stornoway.

In discussion, it was recognised that SSEN are exploring housing options to meet worker accommodation needs as part of planned major developments on the Isle of Lewis; SSEN have made a commitment to leave a lasting housing legacy beyond the lifespan of the planned development works, and there could be scope to explore options to develop a residential care home as part of legacy outcomes. Further sites were noted as being options for potential development.

In discussion, it was recognised that options and opportunities to develop a residential care home for children affected by disabilities had been explored by the Education, Skills and Children's Services Department in the past. It was noted that initial design works had been carried out on a proposed facility, and that community opinion, in the main, had been against the proposal at the time.

It was agreed:

(1) to note the update; and

(2) that the Chief Officer, Assets and Infrastructure would share previous plans for a Residential Care Home for Children in the Outer Hebrides, as previously developed by the Education, Skills and Children's Services Department for review by the Chief Officer, Children's Services – any proposals deemed suitable would be shared with the MOWG for review and consideration as part of the scoping works.

Finance

5. Item to be considered following further scoping.

Service Delivery
Model

6. The Chief Officer, Children's Services noted that Stornoway had been identified as the most appropriate site to host a residential care home for children with severe and complex needs in line with national policies, including *'The Promise'*. If based in Stornoway, the care home would allow residents to remain within their community to access wider needs; the facility would be in close proximity to The Nicolson Institute, providing additional support need education, and Ardseileach Care Home, where children and young people could transition to on attaining adulthood.

In discussion, it was recognised that it is essential that the education needs of children within the residential care home can be met locally; if this is not met locally there will still be a requirement for specialist mainland provision. It was noted that a redesign of the additional support need base in The Nicolson Institute is being finalised, with works scheduled to commence over Summer 2025. Children's Services will liaise closely with The Nicolson Institute in relation to the proposal, and what additional support need provision would be required to support children with severe and complex needs who are in residential care.

It was noted that in addition to providing a care setting for children and young people affected by disabilities, the proposed care home would be used as a setting to develop the growth needs of residents, support them to fulfil their full potential, and enhance their sense of community participation and belonging. It was recognised that each child and young person has unique physical, educational and emotional needs; care may be required 24/7, with 'eyes on' care, support with eating, movement etc.

The demand on the care home is anticipated to fluctuate based on need at the time, and it is proposed that employees within the residential care home will have a large degree of flexibility in their roles and will be deployed to support care in the community and other roles within Children's Services in periods where the care home is not being fully utilised.

In discussion, it was noted that the development of a residential care home to meet the needs of children affected by disabilities would, in addition to allowing children and young people to remain within their community, create and support high skilled jobs in the islands, and support families to be more economically active in the islands, with less time and finance required for mainland travel, and greater opportunity to spend time with their child(ren). The Children's Services Resources Manager noted that the ongoing scoping work will have no immediate impact on existing services, and that the work in relation to the development of a residential care home for children affected by disabilities would be incorporated into the Integrated Children's Services Plan.

The Service Manager – Resources indicated that there is a need to ensure that the proposal is developed fully for consideration as part of the 2028 – 2033 Capital Programme - a planned list of large-scale infrastructure projects, funded by the Comhairle, that aim to improve public services and facilities within the Outer Hebrides. The proposal will be unable to proceed until at least 2034 unless the timescale for inclusion within the 2028 – 2033 is met.

It was noted that there is a need to undertake further scoping of the proposal, including greater understanding of education need, current provision, potential location for the care home, opportunities through partnership working with the private and public sector, previous design works, how such facilities work in other island areas, learning from Care Inspectorate Reports of similar facilities elsewhere in Scotland, opportunities for initiatives outwith Lewis and Harris; this will inform financial options and opportunities.

It was agreed:

- (1) to note the update; and**
- (2) that the Chief Officer, Children's Services and the Children's Services Resources Manager would undertake further detailed scoping work on the proposal, and bring a detailed scope for the proposal to the next meeting of the Member Officer Working Group for consideration.**

Co-
production/Lived
Experience

7. The Chief Officer, Children's Services noted the need to engage with families who have lived in-experiences of residential care and those where care options are currently being explored when developing the scope of the residential care home. It was recognised that there is an expectation by the Care Inspectorate that families and stakeholders will be fully engaged at an early stage, and throughout the development of the project.

In discussion, it was recognised that there is a need to engage with the wider community at an early stage and promote the benefits the care home will bring to children, young people and families in the Outer Hebrides; notice that such a development poses no threat to the Hillcrest Care Home will be included as part of the awareness raising process.

Discussion was held in relation to previous 'spend to save' initiatives whereby significant capital outlay had been made to support families to remodel homes to meet the needs of their child(ren); this had resulted in the child(ren) being able to remain at home and receive required care and education within their own community.

It was agreed:

- (1) to note the discussion; and**
- (2) that the Children's Services Resources Manager would fully engage with children and families who have lived in experiences of residential care, and those where care options are currently being explored.**

Schedule of
Meetings

8. The Governance and Elections Manager; Chief Officer, Children's Services; and Children's Services Resources Manager would meet to consider the schedule of meetings for the Children's Services Member Officer Working Group, based on the timeline for scoping.