



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

LOCAL NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE: TEACHING STAFF

Minute of Meeting held in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Stornoway on Tuesday, 18 March 2025 at 10.30am.

PRESENT

Ms Paul Finnegan (Chair)
Mr Ms Karen Graham (Vice-Chair)
Mr Angus McCormack
Dr Frances Murray
Mr George Murray

Mr Niall Thomson
Mr Roderick MacNeil
Mr Jamie Macleod
Mr Sam Jones
Mr Donald A Macleod

APOLOGIES

Mr Calum Maclean

Mr Iain M Macleod

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Mary Clare Ferguson
Ms Carmen Macdonald
Ms Louise Smith

Ms Jean Macdonald
Ms Anne Blyth
Mr Derek Mackay

The Chair ruled items 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 as urgent to enable the matters to be considered prior to the next meeting of the Committee.

MINUTES

Minute of Meeting of 19 November 2024 1

The Minute of the Meeting of 19 November 2024 was **approved**.

FINANCE

Comhairle Budget Update 2

With reference to item 8 of the Minute of the Meeting of 19 November 2024 the Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services submitted a Report which provided an update on the Comhairle budget for 2025-26 and the associated savings implications for Education and Children's Services. The Report indicated that at the meeting of the Comhairle on 25 February 2025, a balanced budget was agreed for 2025-26. This decision involved the use of reserves, an increase in Council Tax of 7.5% and implementation of a number of savings across Comhairle services.

The Report further indicated that in terms of identified savings that affect education and schools, a total of £387,000 was identified and agreed as part of the budget setting process, including the removal of Comhairle top-up sponsorship of the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). The total operating budget for Education and Children's Services Department for 2025-26 is £55.6M This encompasses all department functions including education, ASN and support services, children's services social work, libraries, sport and health services and adult learning.

It was agreed to note the Report.

PERSONNEL MATTERS

Sickness Absence Policy 3

The Chief Executive submitted a Report which detailed the planned review of the Sickness Absence Procedure. The Report indicated that as previously indicated to the Committee, a number of policies and procedures are scheduled for review, this includes the Sickness Absence Procedure. This procedure was last reviewed in 2019.

This matter was considered by the Employee Forum on 13 March 2025. The results from the employee survey, benchmarking and internal consultation, including the Committee will inform the review.

It was agreed, insofar as the interests of the Committee were concerned, that members of the Local Negotiating Committee: Teaching Staff would review the Sickness Absence Procedure and provide any feedback in relation to any areas that merit review to the Human Resources Manager by 25 April 2025.

Work Well Framework 4

The Chief Officer, HR, Strategy and Performance submitted a Report which detailed the review of three policies aligned to the Work Well Framework. The Report indicated that the Comhairle approved the Organisational and Development Strategy 2024-2030 on 4 December 2024. The vision of the new Strategy is to create a healthy and sustainable workplace which will promote the achievement of corporate goals and personal development. The Strategy aims to develop a dynamic working environment through three integrated frameworks, one of which is to Work Well. The three Comhairle Policies to be reviewed are, the Stress Prevention Policy, the Health and Wellbeing Policy and the Violence and Aggression policy.

The Report further indicated that the LNCT are invited to review the three policies and to provide comment by 25 April 2025.

It was agreed, insofar as the interests of the Committee were concerned, to:

- (1) review the current Stress Prevention Policy;**
- (2) review the current Employee Health and Wellbeing Strategy;**
- (3) review the revised Corporate Violence and Aggression Policy; and**
- (4) provide comment on the development of the new Policies to the Human Resources Manager by 25 April 2025.**

EDUCATION PROVISION

Display Equipment Guidance 5

The LNCT Joint Secretary submitted a Report which sought agreement to update the Comhairle's Display Screen Equipment Guidance to reflect HSE Guidance and the relevant SI (1992 No. 2792 The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992). The Report indicated that at present, the Comhairle's existing policy indicates that the Comhairle will contribute £70 towards the cost of tests and special corrective appliances.

The Senior Health and Safety Officer outlined the need for a review of the Display Screen Equipment Guidance and indicated that an initial scoping of current provision in other local authorities had commenced, and that advice and guidance had been sought from local Opticians.

It was agreed that the Senior Health and Safety Officer would review the Display Screen Equipment Guidance and bring a Report back to a future meeting of the Local Negotiating Committee: Teaching Staff.

Application of the Special Leave Policy 6

The LNCT Joint Secretary submitted a Report which sought clarification on the provision in the Special Leave Policy, specifically in Section 3 – Unpaid Leave, to allow teachers the option of working back leave rather than taking unpaid leave in certain circumstances. The Report indicated that Teachers and school staff do not have access to flexi or annual leave and should therefore be able to use the 'work back' clause, with their line manager's agreement, if they need to take time off for dependents.

It was agreed that the Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services would review the Special Leave Policy, particularly in relation to unpaid leave and options for Teachers and school staff to work back leave in place of unpaid leave in certain circumstances and submit a Report to a future meeting of the Local Negotiating Committee: Teaching Staff.

Teacher Numbers 7

The LNCT Joint Secretary submitted a Report which sought assurance that the Comhairle intends to honour the Scottish Government's pledge to maintain Teacher numbers at 2023 levels, and to consider information as to how the Comhairle plans to fulfil the additional reduction in class contact time to 21 hours if/when agreement is reached at SNCT with COSLA and Scottish Government.

The Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services indicated that a reduction in Teacher numbers had not been considered within the Budget Saving proposals for 2025/26, and that Teacher numbers would be retained at 2023 levels, with a recognition that there are a number of variables which could impact fte Teaching levels including school rolls. The Chief Officer further noted that the Comhairle is limited in being able to take a clear position on the impact of any potential reduction in relation to class contact time to 21 hours while discussions are ongoing, but would honour any decisions made at a national level.

It was agreed:

- (1) to aim to maintain teacher numbers for 25/26 at 2023 levels; and**
- (2) that the Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services would submit an update Report to a future meeting in relation to national discussions on the potential reduction of class contact time to 21 hours, and the impact this could have on Teaching numbers in the Western Isles.**

Constitutional Amendment to Recognise SLS 8

The Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services submitted a Report which sought consideration of a request from the trade union School Leaders Scotland to be recognised as a member trade union of the LNCT. The Report indicated that the Comhairle had received a formal request from the School Leaders Scotland (SLS) Council Member for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in January 2025 to be recognised as an LNCT member trade union and to be represented through one place in the employee-side membership. The request has been confirmed to be valid and competent and must be considered under the requirements upon the Comhairle from the Trade Union and Labour (Consolidation) Act 1992.

In discussion, representatives from the Employee Side noted that members of the SLS had a dual role as both Teaching/ school staff and the management of schools, and could be better placed on the Employer Side if any decision is made to include SLS representation on the LNCT. It was noted that any decision would require consideration of the methodology for SLS involvement on the LNCT on a pro-rata basis.

The Report indicated that Recognition of SLS in the LNCT will require agreement to amend the Constitution and Framework for Local Recognition and Procedure Agreement of the committee.

It was agreed:

- (1) to note the Report;**
- (2) to defer consideration of the request from the trade union School Leaders Scotland (SLS) to be recognised as a member trade union of the LNCT until further legal advice had been obtained on the recognition process; and**

- (3) that the Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services would submit an update Report in relation to the Constitutional Amendment to Recognise School Leaders Scotland as an Employee-Side Member Trade Union of the Local Negotiating Committee: Teaching Staff to a future meeting.**

Education Severe 9
Weather Policy

With reference to item 2 of the Minute of the Meeting of 19 November 2024, the Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services submitted a Report which sought agreement to review and implement an updated Education Policy for Adverse and Severe Weather. The Report indicated that the Comhairle had updated its corporate Severe Weather Plan and Adverse Weather guidance in December 2024 and a new policy for schools and education centres must take account of the provisions and requirements of this plan and guidance.

The Report further indicated that in the interests of having an updated policy reviewed and in place before the winter of 2025, a short life working group has been proposed that will comprise a selection of officers, school management and a trade union representative from both LNCT and JNC union groups.

It was agreed:

- (1) to note the Report; and**
- (2) that Mr Sam Jones would represent the LNCT Employee Side on a short life working group to review and implement an updated Education Policy for Adverse and Severe Weather; and**
- (3) that the Local Negotiating Committee: Teaching Staff would consider the draft Education Policy for Adverse and Severe Weather at a future meeting.**

Gaelic Secondary 10
Education Provision

The Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services submitted a Report which provided information on a proposed feasibility study in relation to Gaelic Secondary Education Provision in the Western Isles.

The Report indicated that at its meeting of 12 February 2025, the Comhairle agreed to the commissioning of a feasibility study and preliminary consultation on the matter of the establishment of a dedicated Gaelic secondary education provision in the Western Isles subject to receipt of external funding. Comhairle officers from the Education, Skills and Children's Services Department and Sgioba na Gàidhlig are now working with partners to plan for the undertaking of the feasibility study. The study will consider all issues, challenges and opportunities for the establishment of such a provision, including equality of provision on an island wide basis.

The Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services confirmed that provision of Gaelic Secondary Education would not impact existing education priorities in the Capital Programme.

It was agreed to note the Report.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Reporting 11
Outstanding

The Chief Executive submitted a Report detailing the Reports Outstanding arising from decisions of the Committee. It was noted that Term Dates (Attendance) had been considered at the LNCT meeting of 27 August 2025 and would be removed.

It was agreed to note the Report.

ADDITIONAL REPORTS

Protecting Instrumental Music Tuition	12	<p>The LNCT Joint Secretary submitted a Report which sought assurance that there would be no cuts to funding for the delivery of Instrumental Music Tuition. It was noted that the EIS had requested that this be considered by LNCTs across Scotland in recognition that some local authorities had made cuts to funding for Instrumental Music Tuition as part of efficiency savings.</p> <p>The Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services indicated that a reduction in Teacher numbers, including Instrumental Music Tutors had not been considered within the Budget Saving proposals for 2025/26, and that the number of Tutors in place would remain at the same level as 2024/25. The Chief Officer noted that this commitment was in place for 2025/26 only, as the Comhairle had received a 1-year settlement, and that funding levels for 2026/27 are unknown.</p> <p>It was agreed to note the Report.</p>
Health Surveillance	13	<p>The LNCT Joint Secretary submitted a Report in relation to Health Surveillance. The Report indicated that Health surveillance is a scheme of repeated health checks which are used to identify ill health caused by work. Health and safety law requires health surveillance when an organisation's workers remain exposed to health risks even after controls have been put in place; control measures may not always be reliable, despite appropriate checking, training and maintenance. Health risks which require health surveillance include noise, vibration and substances hazardous to health. The Report sought the introduction of Health surveillance in line with HSE recommendations for workers that remain exposed to health risks.</p> <p>The Human Resources Manager indicated that the Employee Handbook contained information on Health Surveillance, including an Occupational Health Guidance for Managers, which details the purpose and procedures involved in the delivery of the service and assist Managers who liaise with Occupational Health. This includes Line Managers, with advice from the Health and Safety Section being required to identify employees who require health surveillance and/or fitness for work screening as part of the risk assessment process.</p> <p>It was agreed to note the Report.</p>
Date of Next Meeting	14	<p>The Local Negotiating Committee: Teaching Staff will next meet on Tuesday, 10 June 2025 at 10.30am. The Meeting will be held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Sandwick Road and through Microsoft Teams.</p>