



SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT OFFICER

Report by Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to update the Comhairle on the current role and operational progress of the School Engagement Officer, a service delivered in partnership between the Comhairle and Police Scotland.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Through reviews undertaken by Comhairle secondary schools, particularly The Nicolson Institute, and the work of the Youth Justice Sub-Committee it was identified that there was potential for partnership between the Comhairle and Police Scotland to develop the Campus Police Officer model and establish a School Engagement Officer role in the Western Isles.
- 2.2 As well as providing in school support, guidance and early intervention, the officer would be able to support the work of partnership services in addressing and reducing instances of youth anti-social behaviour within our communities.
- 2.3 By mutual agreement, the new School Engagement Officer would be based in the Nicolson Institute but would also have a responsibility to provide support across all the secondary schools within the Comhairle.
- 2.4 Funding for the project was achieved through allocation of an element of the Strategic Equity Fund for the first year 2024-25. A second year of support for the project was made available from the same source for 2025-26. This is external funding received from Scottish Government to support improved attainment and better outcomes for vulnerable pupils.
- 2.5 Following a period of recruitment led by Police Scotland, PC Steele was appointed as the School Engagement Officer and took up post in the summer of 2024. PC Steele, having completed his first year in the role, is now planning for his second year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle note the Report.**

Contact Officer: David Downham, Quality Improvement Officer Secondary
Appendix: None
Background Papers: None



IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	Finance for the post was identified from the Strategic Equity Fund, a subset of the Attainment Scotland Fund and is intended for authorities to support intervention and support for vulnerable pupils to support increasing attainment, attendance, engagement and participation. Annual costs for the project are £49,000 and funding was secured for two years.
Legal	A formal Service Level Agreement is in place between the Comhairle and Police Scotland.
Staffing	The School Engagement Officer is an employee of Police Scotland and they manage all matters relating to the officer's employment including immediate line management.
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities/Child Rights	None
Corporate Strategy	Support Children, Families and Young People: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ensure early intervention in place to keep our most vulnerable children safe Support Caring and Resilient Communities and Quality of Life: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Nurture the safety and resilience of our communities.
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	None

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 There was a need identified by both Police Scotland and the Comhairle to provide early intervention and support to young people within education settings and to reduce youth anti-social behaviour within our communities. Rather than having a reactive approach it was accepted that a proactive approach based on early and positive engagement with young people would be key to achieving successful outcomes.
- 5.2 A partnership was established between the Comhairle and Police Scotland working collaboratively to achieve and support a safe and secure environment for those who work and study within educational premises across the Western Isles.



- 5.3 The Comhairle requested that the Chief Constable consider providing additional policing resources to support this collaborative work by allocating a Police Constable (School Engagement Officer) to work across the multiple educational settings, namely, The Nicolson Institute Campus; Sir E Scott Secondary School Campus; Sgoil Lionacleit Secondary School Campus and Castlebay Secondary School Campus. The Chief Constable accepted this request and agreement was instigated.
- 5.4 A Service Level Agreement was developed and agreed between the Chief Officer Education and Children's Services and the Chief Inspector of the Western Isles Area Command on behalf of the Chief Constable. This allowed for recruitment to take place in the spring of 2024 and an officer appointed to the role.
- 5.5 Funding was achieved through the Strategic Equity Fund, a sub-set of the grant the Comhairle receives through the Attainment Scotland Fund to support vulnerable young people and those experiencing poverty factors affecting their education attainment. It is intended to support increase in attainment, attendance, engagement and participation and the School Engagement Officer supports this work significantly.

DETAIL

- 6.1 The School Engagement Officer (SEO) works collaboratively with the Comhairle to provide the services at the schools at the direction of the Head Teachers. The collaborative working is to provide a safe and secure environment for those who work and study within educational premises across the schools whilst tackling anti-social behaviour, crime and providing early and effective intervention through engagement work.
- 6.2 Some of the duties identified by the Comhairle, which are not exhaustive, include:
 - 1. To provide a visible presence within and around the local community of the schools to engage with the public, local businesses and other partners to improve the quality of life of those concerned;
 - 2. To maintain an awareness of local crime trends and intelligence and to support the prevention and detection of crime through local knowledge and intelligence gained from working within the schools and wider community;
 - 3. To participate in training to improve the efficiency of the post;
 - 4. Devise and implement new initiatives to achieve role objectives;
 - 5. Work as part of the local Community Policing team, taking individual and collective responsibility in relation to the schools and the local community;
 - 6. Provide Support to Response Police Constables through Crime File tasking on issues relating to staff and pupils within the schools;
 - 7. Record and where appropriate investigate crimes or offences relevant to the schools and the community;
 - 8. To be readily accessible by members of the school team and family support services; and to contribute to meetings and discussions in accordance with school and policing practices;
 - 9. Develop and provide inputs to classes within the schools, which fits in with preventative messaging and the key school themes/curriculum;
 - 10. To support and perform restorative practices both in terms of police restorative justice and school restorative justice;
 - 11. To identify young people who are experiencing difficulties, offending or at risk of offending in the community and be an active participant in the multi-agency support of such people;



12. Meet regularly with family support services and school management representatives to identify emerging issues and plan future developments;
13. Carry out safe and well checks for truanting persons on their return to school.

6.3 The duties identified above have translated into the following regular tasks for the SEO

- At 8am the SEO will check on any incidents at the police station over the last 24 hours that he may need to be aware of during the school day,
- Welcoming all the learners and staff as they enter the building,
- during class times the SEO will spread their time between their office base within the school, patrolling the school internally and externally, speaking with staff about any issues or queries they may have, attending classes informally to get to know the pupils and break down barriers,
- Carry out break time patrols, having informal conversations with learners and staff, attend the library to involve in group events, attend lunchtime drop-ins from external partners, get involved with sports being played outdoors to help break down barriers,
- The SEO attends local businesses or areas around town classed as 'hot spots' to ensure there are no issues with youths,
- the SEO is present at the bus park at the end of the school day to ensure all children are safe

6.4 Partnerships

The SEO has been collaborating with some of the local partner agencies. The SEO regularly attends youth clubs held by The Shed and Pointers, whilst also attending, when possible, HIT on a Monday afternoon, Action For Children on a Friday evening and any PEF youth events. The SEO regularly attends ELR every week to have some input with the learners attending there. The SEO works alongside these groups to try and build positive relationships with them. By attending some of these events out with working hours has helped the SEO to build trust with the young people and show them that he is part of their local community. The SEO also regularly visits local businesses (Tesco, Co-op, Engy's, Spar) to show a presence and offer support when there are any issues regarding youth offending.

6.5 Success

By working with the guidance department, teachers and external agencies, the SEO has been able to identify learners to undertake some one-to-one interventions to try and encourage positive behaviours. In doing this, the SEO has been able to assist with guiding the young people to attend classes more frequently, reduce the pattern of behaviour which was present prior to his arrival. Following this intervention SEO has seen examples of young people working hard to get their qualifications and being able to leave school with job prospects. The Nicolson Institute reported that there has been a reduction in learners truanting on school grounds which is a positive. The SEO reports that some learners have felt safer at school, that there was a reduced risk of being bullied and that this is allowing them to grow in confidence and improve attendance.

The SEO has reviewed incidents from his time in post and compared this with the previous year which shows a positive trend. There has been a reduction of crimes committed and concern reports being submitted at the Nicolson Institute. Concern reports have reduced by 57% and crime has reduced by 78%. This may be attributed to the SEO presence in the school.

Reports of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) to the Police have reduced significantly since the SEO has been working with the young people within the school setting. This has been reported positively by the



Comhairle through press outlets in the Western Isles following a public consultation in March and April. In one particular area of Stornoway, which had seen significant levels of ASB, residents reported that the young people had been well behaved for the past six months.

6.6 SEO Future Plans from August 2025

- **PSYV (Police Scotland Youth Volunteers)** - planning to set this up in the volunteer centre in Stornoway with the aim of having it up and running by January 2026.
- **Work Experience** - working with the Duke of Edinburgh Awards to set up a 12-week work experience programme with youths that can go towards certification.
- **Educational Inputs** - working with the guidance department to set up a timetable for the SEO to go in to targeted classes to do inputs on things like Online Safety, Cyberbullying, Drugs Awareness, etc, (this will also be linked in with Sir E Scott, Sgoil Lionacleit and Sgoil Bhàgh a' Chaisteil)
- **Restorative Justice** - planning to work with external agencies to have some restorative practices set up with certain youths that have been identified for the SEO to do some one-to-one work with them to help with their behaviour and to allow them to build positive relationships with the local communities.
- **ASB** - having met with partners from Action for children (AfC) in the Glasgow/Ayrshire area the SEO heard of successful partnership interventions involving young people giving back to their local community. With the assistance of the Area Inspector and Partners through the ASB working group, the SEO hopes to integrate some of the learning from Glasgow/Ayrshire and implement similar work in the Western Isles.

CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The role of the School Engagement Officer is progressing and evolving to meet the ever-changing needs of the educational establishments and communities that it serves. The Comhairle and Police Scotland will continue to collaborate to ensure that the agreed outcomes are achieved.

