



## **CHILDREN'S PARLIAMENT CALL TO ACTION UPDATE**

Report by Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services

### **PURPOSE**

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to provide an update to members following the presentation to this committee by the Children's Parliament in June 2021. Subsequent to that meeting, a report was requested to update members on the four 'calls to action' set out in the original presentation.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The Children's Parliament, established in 1996, is a centre for excellence in Scotland for children's participation and engagement in issues and matters that affect them. The organisation strongly supports children's rights and the adoption of UNCRC.
- 2.2 In May 2021, the Children's Parliament worked with over 100 children in the Western Isles running workshops for children from Castlebay, Lochdar, Sir E Scott and Laxdale schools and nurseries. The participants discussed and investigated issues that were of interest to them and, from their work, a set of four 'calls to action' were created and agreed. They were shared with members at a sitting of Education, Sport & Children's Services Committee. The four 'calls to action' were:
  - Tackling bullying and cyberbullying
  - Having specialist art & PE teachers in schools and nurseries
  - Repairing play spaces
  - Involving children in decision making across the Western Isles
- 2.3 Since the presentation by the Children's Parliament, consideration has been given to the four themes and how they can be recognised and implemented. The report sets out the current position in respect of each.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

Contact Officer: Mary Clare Ferguson, Head of Education  
Appendix: None  
Background Papers: ESCS Committee Report: Children's Parliament Presentation 15/06/21

## IMPLICATIONS

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

<b>Resource Implications</b>	<b>Implications/None</b>
Financial	None
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
<b>Strategic Implications</b>	<b>Implications/None</b>
Risk	None
Equalities	Applicable UNCRC Articles: 12 – Respect for the Views of the Child 13 – Freedom of Expression 28 – A Right to Education 29 – Goals of Education
Corporate Strategy	
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	None

## BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Children’s Parliament is a Scottish organisation working to strengthen the participation and engagement of young people in issues and matters that affect them. The organisation works with young people up to the age of 14 and they run a range of programmes and initiatives to support engagement of children and young people, including those whose views may be marginalised or least heard. The Children’s Parliament works to encourage greater engagement in children’s rights and strongly supports the implementation of UNCRC in Scotland.
- 5.2 In the summer of 2021, the Children’s Parliament worked with children from across the Western Isles to engage in discussion about issues that mattered to them. The activities involved workshops with over 100 children from across the islands, with specific engagement at Castlebay, Lochdar, Sir E Scott and Laxdale schools and nurseries.
- 5.3 The activities culminated in a short report being presented to the Education, Sport and Children’s Services Committee in June 2021 sharing four ‘calls to action’ that summarised the work of the engagement sessions. They were:
- Tackling bullying and cyberbullying
  - Having specialist art & PE teachers in schools and nurseries
  - Repairing play spaces
  - Involving children in decision making across the Western Isles

## **DETAIL**

### **CTA1 – Tackling Bullying and Cyber Bullying.**

- 6.1 Issues of bullying and, particularly, that of online and cyber bullying is an important one for children and young people. The Comhairle has a central anti-bullying policy in place and each school is also tasked with development of their own school policies. The Comhairle has supported schools to develop local projects and initiatives to tackle bullying and encourages wider uptake of them. One of the most successful of these is the development of Anti-Bullying Ambassadors at Stornoway Primary School. This project has seen a reduction in instances of bullying and has created peer support network to target early intervention and support. In secondary schools, the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme has been adopted and is intended to similarly provide early peer intervention and support for young people experiencing issues.
- 6.2 The agreement of the Comhairle in February 2024 to establish a responsible use policy for mobile phones in schools was partly motivated by reducing instances of use of mobiles for the purposes of bullying in schools. The Guidance curriculum in secondary includes lessons on responsible and safe use of online technologies and the mechanisms available to get support and report concerns. The implementation of these policies has already had a positive impact on the wellbeing of pupils.
- 6.3 The Comhairle has adopted the SEEMiS Bullying and Equalities reporting modules for all our schools and this provides a consistent digital platform for school staff to document all reported incidents of bullying and includes people involved, circumstances, reasons, investigations undertaken and outcomes. The data can be analysed at school and authority level to track rates of reporting and to identify and evaluate trends. 35 incidents were recorded in Comhairle schools in 2023-24 and, at the time of writing, seven incidents had been recorded since August 2024.
- 6.4 The recent publication of the of the Authority's Positive Relationships Policy will provide a consistent approach across schools and early years settings across the Western Isles. The policy will support schools develop their own policies and implement an inclusive, nurturing, relational approach, promoting a culture and ethos of positive relationships.

### **CTA2 – Having Specialist Art & PE teachers in schools and nurseries.**

- 6.5 As part of the budget saving exercise in 2016, the Comhairle made the decision to remove the posts of specialist teachers for Music, Art, and PE from primary schools. Since then, the policy has been gradually implemented upon turnover of staff. Primary teachers are universally responsible for the delivery of the full curriculum, including these subject areas. It is a matter for the Comhairle if it wants to consider reinstatement of this part of the service. Estimated costs of doing so are in the region of £850,000 to £1,000,000 per year. In the current financial climate, it would not be advised to reinstate such a provision.
- 6.6 Since the removal of subject specialist teachers in primary schools, the department and schools have worked to provide training and access to support programmes and resources to support delivery. Many schools have also forged highly effective community partnerships to support delivery of the arts, music, and sport. Schools have also been able to access online specialist input from e-Sgoil.

### **CTA3 – Repairing Play Spaces**

- 6.7 The Comhairle has undertaken work to review and consult with communities about the upgrading of playparks and play spaces. This included extensive consultation with children and young people across our schools since the Children’s Parliament undertook their work in 2021. The consultation resulted in the drawing up of a list of playpark locations to receive investment and improvement. Funding received from Scottish Government to support renewal of playparks is being allocated to these locations to improve the facilities and provide better and more suitable play spaces. It is intended that the renewal work will continue between 2024 and 2026, subject to securing the continuing funding from Scottish Government.

### **CTA4 – Involving Children in Decision Making across the Western Isles**

- 6.8 Schools continue to use the ‘How Good is our School’ self-evaluation framework for children and young people. This resource supports them to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of the work of their schools and to contribute to improvements and decisions about their schools. Every school is expected to have a Pupil Council or equivalent representative committee to facilitate involvement in decision making and the life of the school.
- 6.9 All Comhairle schools are enrolled in the UN Rights Respecting Schools Award scheme (RRSA). This scheme promotes significant involvement of children and young people in embedding children’s rights in the curriculum and in the life and work of the school. Implementation involves schools in establishing RRSA committees of children and young people to inform the school’s approaches, policies and to contribute to decision making about how schools work to implement a rights-based approach.
- 6.10 There are two members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) in the Comhairle area, and the Comhairle has been working to include them in increasing numbers of groups and committees, such as the Youth Justice Sub-Committee, to provide a voice for young people. This session, the Central Education Team are planning to organise and host, with the MSYPs, a series of events with our secondary learners with a focus on positive relationships.
- 6.11 In the programme of school visits for 2024-25, the Chief Officer is meeting with Pupil Councils or pupil representative groups to discuss issues and hear their views. Also, the programme of Validated Self-Evaluation (VSE) visits to schools that is underway this session includes meetings and focus groups with young people and seeks their views and opinions on school improvement.
- 6.12 There continues to be potential for young people to take a more active role in committees of the Comhairle, including in the Education, Sport, and Children’s Services committee. There is scope for more involvement of MSYPs or other representatives in policy making groups.

### **CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The Children’s Parliament sessions provided a platform for young people to engage in issues and to discuss together what mattered to them. The calls to action set out well what was discussed at that time and there is now more imperative upon the Comhairle to build on this work and to ensure the views of young people are heard and that they are participative and engaged in matters that affect them.