



## **NATIONAL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK: ANNUAL REPORT, PLAN AND STRETCH AIMS**

Report by Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services

### **PURPOSE**

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to provide information to the Comhairle about the annual statutory report and plan for the National Improvement Framework and associated Scottish Attainment Challenge Stretch Aims Report.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 Statutory Guidance: Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 ([www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot)) places duties on education authorities in relation to the delivery of school education and having due regard to reduce inequalities of educational outcome experienced by pupils as a result of socio-economic disadvantage. This Act requires education authorities to prepare and publish an annual report setting out the steps taken to secure improvements in education provision and outcomes set out in the National Improvement Framework Improvement (NIF) Plan and those identified by the Comhairle.
- 2.2 The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) refreshed Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress, published in May 2023, updated expectations upon education authorities to report on progress with stretch aims and to review stretch aims for 2023-24 onwards to 2025-26.
- 2.3 Five stretch aims are defined nationally, and all authorities must report on them. They are identified as 'Core Stretch Aims'. In addition, local authorities are asked to identify other measures as 'Plus' stretch aims. These are reflective of the local contexts and priorities within each authority. In identifying stretch aims for progress, local authorities are responsible for implementing their local plans to make progress in raising attainment and for closing the poverty-related attainment gap.
- 2.4 The Comhairle is required to report on the impact of plans *to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on reducing the poverty-related attainment gap*. Both reports are included in the appendix. The first report contains the National Improvement Framework Report for 2023-24 and Plan for 2024-25. The second report provides information about progress over the last academic year in respect of the stretch aims. It also sets out future data-informed targets for the stretch aims through to 2026, as required of the SAC Framework.
- 2.5 The Comhairle's National Improvement Framework Plan takes account of other strategic planning frameworks that influence education improvement. This includes the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy and Business Plan, the Northern Alliance Improvement Plan and Plana Cànain Gàidhlig Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2023-2028 (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Gaelic Language Plan 2023-2028).

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle approve the priorities, actions and targets set out in the National Improvement Framework Plan 2024-25 and the Scottish Attainment Challenge Stretch Aims Report for 2024-25 (24-26).**

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Appendix: Scottish Attainment Challenge - Stretch Aims Report 2024-25 CnES Final  
NIF Plan and Report 2024-25 Final CnES  
Background Papers: [Scottish Attainment Challenge: framework for recovery and accelerating progress - gov.scot](#)  
[Scottish Attainment Challenge - Local stretch Aims: 2023/24 to 2025/26 - gov.scot](#)

## IMPLICATIONS

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

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	The Comhairle receives Scottish Government funding annually for the Scottish Attainment Challenge in support of meeting the priorities of the National Improvement Framework
Legal	The Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act 2000 S3F requires education authorities to publish an annual plan that. It must include actions to address the National Improvement Framework. S3H similarly requires education authorities to publish a report annually on its previous plan.
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities	UNCRC Articles apply: Article 28 - Right to Education (Access to primary/secondary education for all) Article 29 – Goals of Education (Education must develop every child’s personality, talents, and abilities to the full) Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education (2017)
Corporate Strategy	The plan addresses a number of priorities and actions within the Corporate Strategy that are explicitly referenced within the plan.
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	None

## BACKGROUND

- 5.1 In respect of the Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act 2000, as amended by the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, all education authorities must prepare and publish annual plans. These plans must describe the steps local authorities intend to take, during the planning period:
- with a view to reducing inequalities of outcome experienced by pupils as a result of socio-economic disadvantage;
  - in pursuance of the National Improvement Framework; and
  - the plan must also set out any educational benefits the authorities consider will result from taking all these steps.
- 5.2 In May 2023, the Scottish Government published an update to the National Improvement Framework to support authorities in the creation of their local plans. The Scottish Government and Education Scotland conduct a programme of support and challenge on local progress in improving health and wellbeing and tackling the poverty-related attainment gap. They use data and evidence to inform future developments and adaptations of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

**5.3 The key priorities of the National Improvement Framework are:**

- Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education.
- Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing.
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.
- Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people.
- Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

**5.4 In addition to the priorities, the framework sets out six key drivers to inform planning and improvement. They are:**

- School and ELC leadership
- Teacher and practitioner professionalism
- Parent/carer involvement and engagement
- Curriculum and assessment 6
- School and ELC improvement
- Performance information

5.5 The national SAC Framework sets out an expectation to use a comparison between Quintiles 1 and 5 within the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) as the measure of the poverty gap for each stretch aim. This is not possible for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar as there are no learners within these quintiles. A proxy measure using Free School Meals (FSM) was agreed with Scottish Government. All stretch aims in the report use this as their attainment gap measure. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands are developing an Islands Poverty Index. This is to provide a robust set of poverty measures to be selected for schools that are similar across the three islands. The Index will improve collaborative working between these schools.

5.6 The Stretch Aims Report requires the Comhairle to provide performance data and future targets for five CORE stretch aims that are common to all 32 local authorities. In addition, each authority can set any number of CORE+ stretch aims that are unique to them. All the stretch aims must be based on setting and measuring targets to address the poverty-related attainment gap and, as such, can only be shaped around areas where such data is available.

5.7 The five CORE stretch aims common to all authorities are:

- Curriculum for Excellence achievement levels – P1, 4, 7 literacy combined and numeracy combined;
- The proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more passes at SCQF level 5;
- The proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more passes at SCQF level 6;
- The proportion of 16-19 years olds participating in education, employment or training based on Annual Participation Measure produced by Skills Development Scotland; and
- Health and wellbeing measure: Attendance (locally defined).

5.8 For 2023-26, and in consideration of data available to the Comhairle that can be used to demonstrate a poverty-related attainment gap, two local CORE+ stretch aims were set.

- The attainment in Gàidhlig (Gaelic) and English writing of learners registered for free school meals at P1, P4 and P7
- The proportion of school leavers attaining SCQF level 5 in both Literacy and Numeracy

## **DETAIL**

6.1 In taking forward the National Improvement Framework plan, the Comhairle's Education and Children's Services Department recognises that no aspect of educational improvement can be totally separated from any other. The Comhairle's NIF plan demonstrates the local authority's commitment

to integrating key planning priorities into a single combined improvement plan underpinned by the drivers for improvement found in the National Improvement Framework. There are a number of strategic plans which set a wider context and provide a basis for a common set of aims with other services within Comhairle nan Eilean Siar including the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy and Business Plan, the Northern Alliance Improvement Plan and Plana Cànan Gàidhlig Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 2023-2028 (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Gaelic Language Plan 2023-2028).

- 6.2 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has a vision to secure the very best outcomes for all our young people and has a strong focus on the importance of high-quality education in securing employability and academic pathways. This is to meet the Comhairle's aspirations to retain and strengthen our island population through social and economic growth.

We recognise the importance that Gaelic language and culture plays in the educational experiences of our young people. We consider that the delivery the priorities of the National Improvement Framework and our own Business Plan must universally recognise Gaelic language, Gaelic Medium Education, and the Comhairle's 'Gaelic First' policy.

The priorities and drivers of the National Improvement Framework and Plan articulate strongly with our vision for the learners and communities of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. We recognise that improving attainment, addressing the poverty-related attainment gap, improving health and wellbeing, and strengthening employability and post-school destinations will contribute fundamentally to delivering our vision and aims.

## **CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The actions and targets set out in the National Improvement Framework Plan 2024-25 and the Scottish Attainment Challenge Stretch Aims Report for 2024-25 (24-26) will be used by schools throughout the 2024-25 academic year and beyond to plan for and track improvement in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. In-year monitoring of progress will continue to be a key part of our approaches to ensure an ongoing understanding of progress. This will enable early support and intervention where required. Monitoring of progress will be part of the on-going and regular dialogue between Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Education Scotland, through the Senior Regional Advisors and Attainment Advisors in particular. Reporting on the impact of plans will be through existing mechanisms within the education system. Our next annual plan and report will be prepared and published in Autumn 2025.