

**Minutes of Meeting**

**Wednesday 27th September 2017, 10am, Committee Room 1, Highland Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness**

Attendees:		Apologies:
From 10.00		<b>Giles Baker</b> , Grantown Academy
<b>Fergus Weir (Chair)</b>	Kirkhill Primary School	<b>Wendy Hennem</b> , Tain Royal Academy
<b>Mark Gunn</b>	Nairn Academy	<b>Sandy Dey</b> , Struan Primary
<b>Samantha Blyth</b>	Dingwall Academy	<b>Andy McKenna</b> , Lochaber High school
<b>Audrey Fraser</b>	Ben Wyvis Primary	Croy Primary
<b>Eve Von Delft</b>	Holm Primary	<b>Lorraine Thain</b> , Drakies Primary
<b>Liz Green (Sec)</b>	Culloden Academy	
<b>Kate Morris</b>	Charleston Academy	
<b>Kate MacDonald</b>	Inverness Royal Academy	
<b>Coreen MacRae</b>	Alness Academy	
<b>Sheila</b>	Gledfield Primary	
<b>John Whitfield</b>	Golspie High School	
<b>Katie Christie</b>	Bridgend Primary	
<b>Kirsty Shaw</b>	Portree Academy (via VC Portree)	
<b>Tim Spencer</b>	Edinbane Primary (via VC Portree)	
<b>Rebecca Langlands</b>	Portree Primary (via VC Portree)	
From 11.00		
<b>Jim Steven</b>	Head of Education, Highland Council	
From 12.00		
<b>Allan Gunn</b>	Head of Revenues and Business Support, Highland Council	

**1. Update and confirmation of minutes from Fri 09 June 2017**

Minutes agreed as correct.	<b>Proposed:</b> John Whitfield <b>Seconded:</b> Mark Gunn
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Fergus welcomed everyone to the meeting and each person introduced themselves, including the Video Conference contingent from Portree Highland Council offices which all went very smoothly (thanks to Ros Bell and others for setting up).

**1.1 Communication** is the key to an effective future for HPCP. We currently use a gmail system as a pyramid of communication between Parent Councils, Council and Government. These G-mail accounts are currently administrated by the Highland Council. Out of the total 172 primaries, 29 secondaries and 5 special schools, only 70-80 schools are viewing the gmail system on a regular basis. To help improve this uptake and ensure HPCP control over the gmail system, HPCP has, thanks to the work of Giles Baker from Grantown PC, gained charitable status (see below). HPCP also looks forward to having more on-line forums and using the website more fully to share best practise so that individual Parent Councils are less isolated in their work as volunteers.

The potential for a model communication system is in place but is currently under-used. Storing Parent Council communication on google docs enables proceedings to be automatically archived for future office bearers. It is unfortunate that there is no Parental Involvement Officer (PIO) at the Highland Council – as many other regions have – to help raise awareness. Jim later informed the meeting that there is no funding available for a PIO and this will not happen in Highland. This leaves the HPCP to fill this gap as best it can.

Parental engagement continues to be an uphill struggle with many Parent Council Chairs reporting low numbers turning out to meetings, poor uptake on email communication lists and no knowledge of either the g-mail system or the Council grant made available to each Parent Council (announced via the g-mail system). The meeting also acknowledged that Head Teachers have variable commitment to and interaction with Parent Councils. The strength and activity of Parent Councils is, in part, dependent on the willingness and support of Head Teachers to pass on communications from the Council and support parental engagement with their school. The conference will be an opportunity to look at different Parent Council models that have worked in different situations.

The meeting noted that the communication by Highland Council through Head Teachers to Parent Councils is actually a Statutory Duty and that non-compliance is a serious issue that should be addressed via Highland Council.

**1.2 Charitable Status** enables HPCP to have a free google business account managed by HPCP rather than the Council. Once the new system is set up HPCP will be able to reset passwords and organise distribution lists, and individual Parent Councils will be able to organise forwarding to Parent Forum email addresses very easily. Going forward charitable status will also help HPCP to be taken more seriously and to manage any future finances more effectively.

**Action - Fergus (plus others please) to help set up the new g-suite email system before the end of 2017.**

**2. Parent Council Grant Funding.** The Council has a statutory duty to support Parent Councils and this is done with the grant funding that is announced via the g-mail system. For the last 2016/17 session, 100 Parent Councils did not claim their grant allocation, approximately £4000 of the £40000 made available in the Highland Council budget. Portree High School reported that of the 9 feeder schools, 8 were not using the g-mail system and therefore unable to claim their grant allocation. The grant allocation is set according to pupil numbers in a school, so a small remote primary school has a tiny allocation compared to a larger secondary school. It is important that HPCP know the uptake this year in plenty of time so that neighbouring schools can try to alert each other of what they are missing out on.

**Action - Ros to find out how many schools have not claimed their grant allocation before conference 18 Nov.**

**3. Parent Council Insurance with Zurich,** will continue beyond April 2018, contrary to previous announcements. Schools will still be getting the bulk deal that the Council has arranged, but the paperwork will be done directly with Zurich rather than via a Council officer. Ros at the Council will send out further details once they become available.

**Action - Ros to keep HPCP Secretary updated on insurance procedures for the coming year.**

#### **4. The People Committee, Highland Council**

**4.1** The People Committee (previously Education, Care and Adult Services Committee) sits 4-5 times per year and now covers Care and Learning and Housing, as well as Education. Its new Chair is Alistair Christie. The next meeting is on 17<sup>th</sup> Oct 2017. Sam Blythe from Dingwall Academy is our HPCP representative (with observation rights only and no speaking rights), but is unable to attend as the date falls within the Oct break, so Fergus will attend instead. Jim informed the meeting that the main issues up for discussion are Management of Schools, the Mallaig proposals and 'looked after children'.

**4.2** Fergus reminded the meeting that Committee Convenors should view HPCP representation as an opportunity to help and inform their decision making.

**4.3** Previously there has been talk of having a Strategic Education Sub-Committee that HPCP could join, but Jim informed the meeting that this idea has been questioned and put into doubt on the grounds that it would not be fully democratic.

**4.4** HPCP set its meeting dates to be a week or two before the Committee dates so that we could discuss upcoming issues, but the necessary discussion and reporting papers have not been coming out in time. In fact we have now been informed by Jim that all the substantive discussion about the content of the issues going to committee is done before the papers are written and it would be more effective if HPCP had an input into discussions at an early stage, as the Head Teachers do. Jim informed the meeting that one big issue coming up is the Early Years Development Plan, already a 62 page report. He also said HPCP would need to understand that some issues would be confidential and too sensitive for discussion.

**Action – Jim to ask Bill Alexander (Director of Care and Learning) whether HPCP, as a key stakeholder, can have the agendas for the People Committee in advance and be involved in all relevant discussions at early stage – answer by Wed. 18th October 2017.**

**Action – Liz to add agenda item for next meeting – Where appropriate, how to distribute info related to the People Committee for wider discussion among all Parent Councils within HPCP ?**

**4.5** Jim proposed that we put a 2 week deadline date on actions for him to carry out and that all actions for him and Ros are highlighted in a separate paragraph at the end of the minutes and emailed directly.

**Action - Secretary to add time deadlines to actions in minutes and email directly to relevant persons.**

## **5. HPCP Conference Sat. 18<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

**5.1** Two information letters have now been sent out to all Head Teachers to pass on to Parent Council Chairs, explaining the conference and the booking system. Several Parent Chairs attending the meeting were not aware of this letter or the upcoming conference. The online booking system via Eventbrite is now open for attendees to book their conference place, posted at <http://bit.ly/2xGbe4T>.

**5.2** We are inviting up to two representatives per school to attend the conference. As part of the booking process, two questions can be proposed for putting to John Swinney, the submission deadline now being up until the October holidays. The top ten questions will be put to the Minister to answer at the conference. Fergus will draft a press release about conference and charitable status to go out this week; Jim informed the meeting that the Council publicity department, Ruth Chennar and Alison MacNeil would assist with promoting the press release

**Action - Fergus to draft the press release before 28 Sept 2017.**

**5.3 Conference planning group.** The next conference planning meeting will be 10am, Friday 6<sup>th</sup> October at the So Coco coffee shop on the corner of Church Street and the main Bridge Street/ High Street. Please get in touch if you are able to help also, especially as some cannot attend.

**Action - Liz to send out reminder of planning meeting to the following volunteers by 03 Oct 2017.**

Jon Greenhowe	North Kessock Primary
Kate Morris	Charlston Academy
Kate MacDonald	Inverness High School
Fergus Weir	Kirkhill Primary
Eve Von Delft	Holm Primary
Liz Green	Culloden Academy
Mark Gunn	Nairn Academy
Samantha Blyth	Dingwall Academy

## **6. Social Media Policies**

**6.1** At the previous meeting we were informed that Aileen Mackay is in charge of devising social media guidelines for schools but she was unable to attend the meeting last time. This time, Jim informed the

meeting that Robert Quigley, Head Teacher at Milton of Leys has been seconded to the Council's ICT Group specifically to look into Online Safety for the Council.

Generally individual schools devise a Code of Conduct and Parent Councils would sign up to this when using Facebook or other social media. Several Parent Councils have requested social media guidelines from HPCP.

**6.2** Fergus explained that unfortunately some Parent Councils have experienced abusive posts on Facebook targeting specific parents or teachers, and consequently set up language filters including all swear words plus words such as teacher. Other PCs follow a school 'Code of Conduct' or have set up 'Moderated Public user groups', or closed Facebook groups. Many PCs have not ventured beyond email.

**Action - Fergus to send out request asking whether any schools and parent councils have social media policies, before conference 18 Nov 2017.**

## **7. Governance Review Update**

**7.1** The Scottish Government sought views on governance via a consultation during the period Oct 2016 to January 2017. Jim informed the meeting that over 11,000 responses to the consultation were received, mostly negative. In Jim's experience John Swinney has been very keen to listen, although did agree that the so-called consultation exercise in Inverness was disappointing and far from consultative.

**7.2 Regional Improvement Collaboratives.** Proposals so far are looking at having 7 Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RIC) across Scotland. A new Director for each RIC will be appointed in the next few weeks with advice from the Local Authorities. Each RIC would then write an Improvement Plan for their Region. Where exactly the RIC team and officers would be based is still being discussed.

For Highland, we would be part of the existing Northern Alliance, that is Highland, Moray, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles, now PLUS Argyll and Bute. So as one member at the meeting commented that is geographically half of Scotland.

For Head Teachers, the Council has undertaken a workshop to summarise the findings of the Governance Review (lead by Calum McSween and Hugh Fraser). The biggest concern among Head Teachers is the additional workloads and responsibilities that will be expected of them. Some at the meeting suggested that the Council may like to organise a similar workshop for Parent Council delegates but this seems unlikely.

**7.3 The Fair Funding** consultation document was published in June and all responses have to be in to the Scottish Govt by 13 October 2017.

**7.4 Review of Parental Engagement Strategy.** In response to the NPFS Report published in May (Review of the impact of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006), the Scottish Govt will be conducting further consultation soon ahead of a proposed Education Bill for 2018.

## **8. School Improvement Plans**

**8.1** These plans are produced under the National Improvement Framework and consultation for this usually takes place around Christmas or January time. For the first time in 2017 there was a requirement for Head Teachers to produce a School Improvement Plan annually, as opposed to every 3 years. The deadlines for 2017 were very tight so it is not surprising that Parent Council consultation was not widespread. The Quality Improvement Team checks the plans before releasing any Pupil Equity Funding in June.

**8.2 The 'How Good Is Your School' Fourth Edition (HGIOS4)** is the basis for self-evaluation in schools and forms the basis of school inspections. The word 'parent' is sprinkled throughout the guidelines and is worth a read.

9. **Insight** is the database that schools use to log the results of pupil national qualifications and positive destinations after leaving school. Jim was asked to present what parents should expect to receive from schools regarding the Insight data.

9.1 **Parent Zone** <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/> holds some Insight data from each school. You just need to type in the school name and the web site comes up with the following data:

- positive leaver destinations
- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment in the context of deprivation
- overall attainment of school leavers
- awards gained by leavers
- attendances and absences

9.2 **Strategies on Closing the Attainment Gap** is an online resource

**Action – Jim to send link to HPCP Secretary for putting on HPCP website before Wed 18<sup>th</sup> Oct.**

9.3 **Guidance on Insight areas of discussion for schools and parents** has been written by the Council and will be sent out. It lists the following twelve points:

- ?General presentation on above (need to check wording)
- Identify positives and areas for improvement
- Where is the attainment gap?
- How is the attainment gap being addressed in the improvement plan?
- Does the school have PEF funding?
- What are the spending plans for PEF money
- How many pupils achieved no qualification?
- What is the success rate of pupils who do college courses?
- How many pupils leave school without level 3 in literacy and numeracy?
- ?Are achievement goals attained for all ability levels? (need to check wording)
- How is attendance impacting on performance?
- Are there positive destinations for all pupils?

Many thanks were expressed to Jim for doing this, which HPCP has requested over a number of meetings.

**Action – Jim to send copy of Insight guidance to HPCP Sec. for putting on HPCP website by Wed 18<sup>th</sup> Oct.**

10. **Effective Collaboration between HPCP and Highland Council** was not an original agenda item but became a discussion following concerns that communication related to Parent Councils is not where it could be.

10.1 Fergus re-iterated that the aim of HPCP has always been to work collaboratively and constructively with the Council. HPCP office bearers and members are all parent volunteers but there is a need to get sharper at following up action points and reminding the Council officers of actions that we have agreed during meetings. If HPCP and Highland Council both “hold each other to account” in a constructive way then we can drive improved behaviours and get more done.

10.2 Jim agreed that more progress would be made if the HPCP remains on good terms with the Council officers and asked what he could do that the HPCP felt was overdue and needed done. The following issues were requested by HPCP of the Council to work on.

- Head Teachers should be instructed to contact Parent Council Chairs when emails arrive from the Council for the attention of Parent Council Chairs (otherwise grants will not be claimed);
- Head Teachers should support and engage Parent Councils and work together;
- Council should outline practically how schools can engage Parent Councils in producing aspects of the School Improvement Plan;
- The data capture form each year should include a positive opt-in for parents to agree for their email address to be used by their school Parent Council (this has stalled in the past on the grounds of data protection)

**Action – Jim to ask Brian Porter, Head of Resources about changing the data capture form by 28 Nov. 2017.**

## **11. Parental Finance and the burden of school fund-raising -presentation by Allan Gunn, Head of Revenues and Business Support**

**11.1** Allan explained that through his work on mitigating the impact of welfare reform, he is acutely aware that there are apparent increases in poverty levels and income gaps among parents, often affecting the “working poor”. There are more people renting housing, food bank use is rising, and more parents are being encouraged to seek help through schemes like the school clothing grant. Approximately one in five children in Highland live in poverty, but the impact can be quite localised. For example in south Inverness 5% of children live in poverty, whereas in some localities in Caithness 35% of children live in poverty.

As a parent, Allan is concerned at the level of requests for money from parents and pupils coming from some schools. In particular it is concerning to see letters that are sent home about charity fund-raising and using the word MUST in the donation request. There is concern that this additional burden on households is creating significant hardship for some families, to the extent that some adults may sometimes go without food rather than be stigmatised or stand out for not contributing cash. The Curriculum for Excellence places pressure on schools to encourage pupils to be “good citizens” and do work for charity, creating a social pressure on all pupils and parents regardless of their “ability to pay”.

One parent member at the meeting suggested that a change in Council or school policy stipulating that pupils only do charitable work or acts, rather than charitable fund-raising, could help to remove the stigma. Every pupil can provide skill and time, making it a more equitable way to demonstrate good citizenship.

In collaboration with HPCP, Allan is keen to research parental hardship and the burden of fund-raising and paying for school activities further. On behalf of HPCP, Fergus welcomed this collaboration. We look forward to working with Allan via Highland’s network of Parent Councils.

**11.2 School Resource Funding** is calculated on a per capita pupil basis and so is equitable across Highland, Allan was able to confirm. However, it is widely accepted that the National funding formula does not work for Highland as it is more expensive to run small rural schools and harder to recruit and retain staff.

## **12. AOB**

**12.1 Concern at no physics teacher for Alness Academy** was raised by the Parent Council Chair, Coreen MacRae. Pupils sitting national physics exams at all levels have no physics teacher. Jim responded by acknowledging that this is a real problem. There is shortage of teachers and probationers across Highland generally and the situation is especially bad in subjects like physics. Jim could offer no immediate solution to this acute problem.

**12.2 New HPCP Secretary needed** as Liz will step down as Secretary following the conference minutes being agreed, and agenda for next meeting being set, so the next meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> November will require a new parent volunteer to take minutes.

**ALL CARRIED OVER FROM THE LAST MEETING**

**12.3 PC funding** was discussed with Jim and Ros at the last meeting. The PC grant allocation each year is decided by the Finance department of the Council, and then divided on a strict percentage basis, ie based on the size of the school roll. The amount has decreased by 50% in Highland due to cuts, but is thought to still be much higher in other regions. It was agreed useful to get comparisons among other local authorities. This is an outstanding action from the previous meeting.

**OVERDUE ACTION - Ros to compare PC funding across authorities before next meeting, 28 November 2017.**

**12.4 Lobbying for voting rights.** We still hope that HPCP can achieve voting rights on the People Committee. Among all the Council regions in Scotland, about 50% of PC reps have some voting rights and 50% have none. The National Parent Forum for Scotland is lobbying for statutory change and a Scottish Government Review. Currently Councils are free to decide either way. Highland Council is reticent to have any external votes and any vote to change this would require the whole Council to make a decision. Given this background it was discussed how the Council Leader Margaret Davidson could perhaps help to lead the Council in persuading the People Committee to accept 2 HPCP reps with voting rights. It is believed that the local media would support HPCP's case.

**OVERDUE ACTION - Fergus and Sam to book a meeting with Margaret Davidson before the HPCP Conference, Saturday 18 November 2017.**

**12.5 Online courses** are being organised by Peter Finlayson. 13 online courses are currently available.

**OVERDUE ACTION - Jim to report on the list of online courses available by Wednesday 11 October 2017.**

**12.6 Chromebook roll-out sequence.**

**OVERDUE ACTION - Fergus to circulate the list of chromebook roll out sequence across schools before conference 18 November 2017.**

**13. Dates for next meetings.**

13.1 The next full HPCP meeting in 2017 is scheduled to take place at Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, Tuesday 28 November.

13.2 The HPCP conference this year will be held Saturday 18 November 2017 at Charleston Academy, Inverness.

13.3 The next Conference Planning meeting will be held on Friday 6 October 2017 at the So Coko Coffee Shop in Inverness at 10.00.