

Highland Children's Forum Bulletin December 2018



Season's Greetings

Season's Greetings to all our members and other interested parties. We hope that you will be able to enjoy some time out of work to be with family over the coming weeks.

However, in these days of austerity, when Universal Credit has thrown many working and unemployed people into debt, dependency on food banks and even homelessness, this will not be a joyful time for some. The current reductions in the public sector and the planned reductions in the third sector commissioned services will push many more families towards crisis.

The Highland Council are now an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)-Aware Council.

The budget decisions to be deliberated over the coming month will have significant impact on vulnerable children and families, potentially increasing rather than addressing the adversity our children experience. This is a time for pulling together not tearing apart. Public and Third Sector organisations need to work in partnership more than ever before. The ground-up work of listening to children and families, showing care and value towards them has never been more important.

Over and over in HCF reports children and parents have said that "It is not about money or resources. It is about empathy and intuition" (HCF

2010) and “the overarching theme of the responses from young people, parents and professionals was about attitude: the solution was to build positive relationships built on empathy and understanding.” (HCF 2018) May this new year be marked by Service and Community Planning that truly seeks to listen to the voices of those least able to be heard and to demonstrate a keenness to work in partnership for the improved outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people living in Highland.



Highland Children’s Forum News

Highland Children’s Forum held a Special General Meeting on 10th December to pass a resolution to adopt a revised constitution to enable Highland Children’s Forum, an unincorporated charity, to become Highland Children and Young People’s Forum Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). The resolution was unanimously accepted and the process of becoming a SCIO will now begin.

The Forum has recently been identifying young people who would wish to become members of a Young People’s Advisory Group to help shape the direction and priorities of the Forum going forward. The first meeting will be held this month. In the New Year work will begin to establish the Children’s Advisory Group.

We look forward to realising the potential for these groups in enabling them to have a direct influence on policy decisions and practice development.

Third Sector Children's Forum (TSCF)



Third Sector Children's Forum sand supportive Councillors

This is the new and simpler name for the Highland Third Sector Children and Families Services Group. Representatives of the group were present in the Council Chamber at the recent Care, Learning and Housing Committee (6th December) so that Councillors could chat and learn about the services.

TSCF had collaborated on producing a Counter Proposal to the Highland Council Redesign Board Proposal. The Counter Proposal was one about consultation with children and families and partnership working with organisations to ensure that identified budget cuts were managed with minimal impact on vulnerable children and families. The counter proposal was not tabled along with the Redesign Board proposal, but Councillor Andrew Baxter was able to secure an amendment to the Redesign Board paper to include the recommendations of the TSCF Counter Proposal and to emphasise the need to consult with the organisations involved.

The Redesign Board Proposal went to The Highland Council full committee meeting on 25th October: link to webcast here: https://highland.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/312993

At the full council meeting, members of the Redesign Board: Sandra Campbell, Interim Director of Care and Learning; Councillor Jarvie and Evelyn Johnson, Corporate Audit & Performance Manager, suggested that the Redesign Board aim was to focus on better services for children and young people.

Councillor Christie spoke up to say that he was "frustrated" by the apparent focus on savings. The Redesign Board should have been focussed on "providing services to those that need it." He summarised his point by saying that "It is about providing the right care at the right time

with the right interventions in the right way to change lives and improve outcomes.”

Councillor Currie spoke up to note the lack of an Equalities Impact Assessment. She felt “uneasy” about making budget decisions when there was “absolutely no information whatsoever in terms of equalities about how this is going to impact our vulnerable children and families in Highland.”

The Redesign Board should have been focussed on “providing services to those that need it.”

Councillor Andrew Baxter secured an amendment to ensure that the targets for savings will require a full impact assessment and timescales may need to be reviewed in the content of Council’s future budget considerations preferably at the Care, Learning and Housing Committee, where partners from the third sector can be present and able to contribute.

When the Counter Proposal was not accepted for presentation to committee, agreement was reached with the Chair of the Care, Learning and Housing Committee, then Councillor Andrew Baxter, that the Third Sector Children’s Forum could present a collaborative six monthly report about the services commissioned by the Highland Council, in the way that Highlife Highland does. The first of these reports will now be tabled at the January Care, Learning and Housing Committee.

Third Sector Cuts Take Hold



1 - Direct Child Care

Direct Child Care, an organisation listed in the Redesign Board proposal, provide child care to children with complex disability. Direct Child Care contacted Council Officers in October to seek support and advice about their financial situation and two months later had not received a reply. This organisation has had to begin cessation planning to meet its legal obligations to employees.

The potential loss of this organisation will mean that families with children with complex disability will be left without much needed respite and access to out of school care for their children.

If you think you are likely to be affected by this decision



Consultation Work

The Consultation Lead is presenting key messages from the Sexual Health and Relationship Education for Additional Support Needs (SHARE for ASN) at a national conference. The mainstream report is due for publication shortly.

The Consultation Lead has been working to bring together the Young People's Advisory Group, who will meet for the first time this month.

The Consultation Lead has also been working on the potential for a Pan-Highland, Pan-Disability structure for participation. She also continues to work with Community Partnerships and Highlife Highland to promote resources for engagement with children and young people with additional support needs.



Policy Work

Much of the Policy Lead's time has been spent working with others to pull together the TSCF Counter Proposal and Services Report.

The Policy Lead has also worked with Highlife Highland on the development of an Inclusion Policy and with public and third sector partners in the development of both Youth Work and Participation Strategies.

The Policy Lead is now the elected Third Sector Representative on the Care, Learning and Housing Committee and the Leadership Group.