



**REPORT TO: EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE ON 18 NOVEMBER 2020**

SUBJECT: COUNSELLING THROUGH SCHOOLS

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND
ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the 2018-19 Programme for Government in which it stated that around 350 new counsellor positions would be created in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2019) and on the proposed approach to delivering Counselling through Schools support in Moray.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Education, Communities and Organisational Development Committee following a decision of Moray Council on 17 June 2020 to agree a simplified committee structure as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the case of this committee the combining of the delegated responsibilities of Children and Young People Services, Governance, Strategy and Performance, (para 9 of the minute refers).

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that Committee agrees:

- (i) to utilise the Scottish Government funding to commission a holistic Counselling through Schools service as part of a whole school approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing; and**
- (ii) that progress on the delivery of a Counselling through Schools service is brought back to a future meeting of this Committee.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Scottish Government's 10 year mental health strategy (2017-2027) recognises the need for targeted and specialist mental Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), but also promotes effective prevention and early intervention through support services at a local level, delivered as close to the young people as possible. The Council's Corporate Plan includes Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing as a key area of work. The Moray Children's Services plan (2020-2023), developed in partnership with children, young people, families, communities and

professionals, highlights improvement in the wellbeing of children, young people and families as one of four key priority areas.

- 3.2 The 2018-19 Programme for Government included a commitment to invest in school counselling services across Scotland, and the Council has since been allocated funding from the Scottish Government to ensure every child aged 10 and over in Moray has access to counselling services to complement the range of existing and universal targeted approaches already available in schools to help support the mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of children and young people.

Scottish Government Delivery Principles

- 3.3 COSLA Officers and Scottish Government Officers worked with professional advisors to develop a proposed set of principles for delivering counselling through schools, whilst enabling local authorities to ensure any provision is complementary and linked to existing local provision.

The delivery principles are:

- i. The commitment to the provision of counselling through schools should be delivered in partnership between national and local government and relevant partners, and should build upon the services already in place, wherever possible.
- ii. The provision of counselling should be part of a holistic, child-centred approach to improving the mental health & wellbeing of children and young people.
- iii. Counselling services should be delivered within an agreed definition of counselling by qualified counsellors registered with an appropriate registration body.
- iv. Counselling services should be available to secondary school pupils primarily, with access for children over the age of 10 in primary and special schools.
- v. In recognition of the need to ensure young people are safe, services should ensure a robust assessment is carried out and young people are supported to access alternative services where counselling may not be appropriate.
- vi. There should be availability of counselling services during school holidays to ensure continued support for young people.
- vii. The provision of counselling through schools should align to and/or enhance the local services to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.
- viii. Counselling services should be accessible. Utilising technology, virtual approaches and delivery in non-educational settings where communities need it.
- ix. Local policies in relation to child protection and information sharing should be followed. The requirements of the registering body, for example in terms of professional conduct and supervision should also be followed.

Definition of ‘Counsellor’

- 3.4 Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland (COSCA) define the purpose of counselling as to provide opportunities for those seeking help to work towards ways of living in more satisfying and resourceful ways. The counselling process involves using defined therapeutic methods to support individuals to deepen their self-understanding, and to find their own ways of alleviating distress and enabling positive change.
- 3.5 In a review of UK based school counselling, Cooper (2013) draws a distinction between a professionally trained counsellor, and a professional who has counselling skills which he or she utilises within the context of their work with children and young people (e.g. Specialist Teachers, Pupils Support Workers, Social Workers, School Nurses, Youth Workers).
- 3.6 Counselling is not under any statutory regulation in the UK, but it is supported and overseen by a range of national professional bodies, namely: British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP); UK Council for Psychotherapy; and Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland (COSCA). In Scotland COSCA awards and accredits courses in counselling skills at both certificate and diploma level for professional practice and maintains a directory of accredited counsellor members and counselling supervisors. The accreditation system requires counsellors to meet specific criteria relating to training, practice and supervision, which provides an indication of competence and adherence to defined ethics and a code of practice.
- 3.7 Practice supervision is distinct from line management supervision and is carried out by another qualified counsellor. The purpose of supervision is to provide the practitioner with a safe and confidential space to reflect on and discuss their work, and their professional responses to the issues of concern to their clients. Practice supervision is also necessary to ensure that an individual works within the boundaries of their professional competencies, appropriately involving other services when a situation is beyond their individual competence or the defined scope of their professional role.

The Moray Context

- 3.8 In line with the Delivery Principles highlighted above, the provision of counselling through schools must form part of an integrated model for supporting the mental and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. In Moray the promotion of positive emotional wellbeing for all children and young people is a key function of support provided by a number of services, including the Educational Psychology Service, the Social, Emotional and Behavioural Needs (SEBN) Service, School Nurses and Education Support Officers in partnership with school based staff, partner agencies, young people and their families.
- 3.9 There is currently one qualified Counsellor employed within the SEBN service supporting children and young people with complex behavioural needs. Some schools have also commissioned counselling support using their PEF funding. Whilst valuable this support is neither consistent nor equitable at present and where it is provided is not always part of a staged approach, or provided within the GIRFEC Practice Model.

- 3.10 The Council's Educational Psychology Service has previously developed, tested and evaluated an early intervention Life Coaching model, which offered support for children and their families. The evidence showed sustained improvement in the young person's wellbeing due to the engagement of the whole family at an early stage.
- 3.11 The ongoing review of the Additional Support Needs services has highlighted the need to provide flexible and responsive approaches to meeting children and young people's additional support and wellbeing needs following a staged intervention model within the educational context. The CONNECT team approach during the lockdown period demonstrated the benefits of considering all available community assets to support children and young people's wellbeing needs, and the value of working alongside children, young people and families to improve outcomes.
- 3.12 Children's Services partners, led by the GIRFEC Leadership Group sited within the Community Planning Partnership governance structure, is currently looking at how to develop a more coordinated, whole systems approach to addressing the mental wellbeing needs of children and young people in Moray, drawing on funding from a number of different sources, including from Health and the third sector. The approach to school counselling needs to take account of existing and developing services to ensure it becomes a key resource within a network of support for children, young people and their families.

Proposed Approach

- 3.13 Two options have been considered for delivery of the school counselling commitment in Moray:
- (i) Recruitment of a team of counsellors managed through the Council's Educational Psychology Service, with clinical supervision provided by NHS colleagues (CAMHS), and performance and impact reporting developed by an Educational Psychology Assistant.
 - (ii) Commissioning the full service from an external provider.
- 3.14 A Prior Information Notice (PIN) was issued in September 2020 to determine potential external interest in a commissioning process. Six good quality responses were received to the PIN, including from organisations that are already delivering services that meet the principles of the Counselling through Schools guidance in other local authority areas.
- 3.15 The PIN responses recognised the need to locate the school counselling provision within a 'whole system approach' that includes early intervention support in schools, parental support and capacity building of school based staff. They also highlighted the need to ensure services are provided year round, within both school and community settings, and with a virtual option available to ensure delivery can proceed during Covid restrictions, and to provide ready access to our most rural communities.
- 3.16 The recommended option is to proceed with the commissioning of the full service from an external provider for the following reasons:

- (i) Service is developed by an organisation with experience of developing and managing similar services in other local authority areas.
 - (ii) Recruitment, line management, training and clinical supervision all managed by a single organisation.
 - (iii) Ability of external provider to develop the service at pace, with full rollout anticipated by April 2021. It is acknowledged that there have been delays in bringing forward a proposed approach for school counselling due in part to Covid, and we need to move forward quickly to meet increasing need in our schools.
 - (iv) Delivery by an organisation that is already set up to deliver 52 weeks per year, outside school hours, and with virtual delivery options.
 - (v) Opportunity to link with wider 'whole school' and early intervention approaches through a single contract, with the potential to leverage in additional child and adolescent mental health and wellbeing funding from other Community Planning partners.
- 3.17 It should be noted that for both options the Council would be looking to consolidate all existing counselling provision in Moray within this single, Moray wide offer.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

This report relates to the priority 'Provide opportunities where young people can achieve their potential to be the best they can be' from the Corporate Plan and to 'Building a better future for our children and young people in Moray' from the LOIP.

(b) Policy and Legal

The proposals are in line the Council's duties as laid down in 2018-19 Programme for Government Statement and the Scottish Government Guidance for Education Authorities Establishing Access to Counselling in Secondary Schools (October 2019).

(c) Financial Implications

Moray Council has been allocated £207,000 for 2019/20 and £270,000 per year for the next three years. The total cost of the school counselling provision will be within this allocation. After this time the funding will be baselined into the local authority financial settlement, and robust monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the service will be available to help inform strategic planning and future decision-making regarding effective mental wellbeing support, linked to future Children's Services Plans. The SEBN pupil counsellor (annual cost £38,811) and school appointed counsellor posts will be considered as the service is developed, with the potential to review how these service offers are delivered and budgeted for as the commissioned service develops.

(d) Risk Implications

There is a risk that if we do not proceed with the development of a school counselling provision in Moray the Council will be unable to meet its public duties as set out in the 2018-19 Programme for Government, and lead to inconsistencies in mental wellbeing support in Moray in relation to the rest of Scotland.

(e) Staffing Implications

The existing Moray based counselling provision within the SEBN service and provided through PEF funding will be considered alongside this new service provision to ensure consistency in approach, quality assurance and evaluation of impact.

There may be implications under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (Tupe) Regulations dependent upon the final solution. Any Tupe obligations and requirements will be addressed as necessary.

(f) Property Issues

There are no property issues.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

The provision of a Moray wide counselling service will ensure equitable access, with all children and young people having access to quality counselling provision at the right time for them.

(h) Consultations

Head of Education (Chief Education Officer), Head of Children & Families and Criminal Justice Social Work, Karen Lees, Quality Improvement Manager, Stewart McLauchlan, Quality Improvement Manager, Paul Connor, Principal Accountant, the Human Resources Manager, the Equal Opportunities Officer and Tracey Sutherland, Committee Services Officer have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this report as regards their respective responsibilities.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 A service to provide Counselling through Schools should be implemented as soon as possible, and by April 2021 at the latest, to enhance the current approaches to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people across Moray. This new service will utilise the Scottish Government funding to commission a holistic Counselling through Schools service as part of a whole school approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing.**

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Background Papers:
Ref:

