ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL **COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

EDUCATION SERVICE **11 MARCH 2021**

COUNSELLING IN SCHOOLS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The main purpose of this report is to provide background and update on the progress of the establishment of a new service to provide counselling in schools across Argyll and Bute for children and young people age 10 years and upwards.

1.2 The Scottish Government's 10 year Mental Health Strategy (2017-2027), recognises the need for targeted and specialist Child and 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. Funding has been committed from this financial year for a period of three years to support the delivery of counselling through schools following a set of ten nationally agreed core principles.

1.3 While this commitment predated the global pandemic, the current circumstances have highlighted further the need to provide this level of support for many of our children and young people.

1.4 Following a robust programme of recruitment, a team leader and suitably skilled and experienced counsellors have been appointed. The team leader has been in place since the beginning of December 2020 with the counsellors taking up post on 11 January 2021.

1.5 The committee is asked to endorse the significant progress made against the commitment to recruit and deliver a counselling service across our schools.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Supporting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people is everyone's business. The benefits to the individual and to wider society of preventing problems from arising and intervening early are significant. For schools, this can result in improvements in attainment, attendance and behaviour as well as happier, more confident and resilient pupils.

2.2 The 10 year mental health strategy includes a number of recommendations that have been taken on board as part of the current strategy in Argyll and Bute. This includes the development of the framework for practice and associated resource hub *Our Children, Their Mental Health*, training and implementation support for Early Learning and Childcare settings and Primary Schools on the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) curriculum and the delivery of a Nurture and Relationships strategy across educational establishments.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The committee is asked to endorse the significant progress made against the commitment to recruit and deliver a counselling service across our schools.

4.0 DETAIL

4.1 The vision for the Education Service is that **together we will realise ambition, excellence and equality for all**. In practice, this involves the promotion of the principles of Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) across education, health and social care. This should involve the Named Person, in partnership with families and other agencies, using the Argyll and Bute Practice Model and the Child's Plan, to identify, assess and put support in

place for children and young people with a wide range of wellbeing concerns and additional support needs. This will include those who experience emotional wellbeing difficulties and mental health issues.

4.2 In Argyll and Bute, the promotion of positive emotional wellbeing for all children and young people is a key function of the support provided by the Educational Psychology Service, Education Support Officers for Inclusion and Equality and Primary Mental Health Workers (PMHW), in collaboration with school staff, partner agencies, young people and their families. Where staff in schools have particular concerns about a young person's mental health, they will often consult with their Educational Psychologist (EP) or PMHW in the first instance, before requesting a service from Tier 3 CAMHS, if this is required.

4.3 To support the introduction of access to counsellors through schools the Scottish Government is providing £12 million to local authorities for 2019/20, rising to £16 million in each of the three financial years 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23. Within Argyll and Bute the funding allocated is £286,000 for this financial year and £377,000 for each of the following three years.

4.4 This funding provides the resource to ensure greater equity and availability of this type of support, including through our island schools. In addition to the EPs and PMHWs, some schools have been offered counselling services, provided by voluntary or 3rd sector organisations, in their geographic areas. With the access to additional resourcing through Pupil Equity Funding, some schools have bought in counselling services as part of the support they provide for pupils. While valuable, this support is neither consistent nor equitable at present and where it is provided, it is not always part of a staged approach or provided within the GIRFEC Practice Model.

4.5 The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) define school based counselling as*: 'a professional activity delivered by qualified practitioners in schools. Counsellors offer troubled and/or distressed children and young people an opportunity to talk about their difficulties, within a relationship of agreed confidentiality.'*

4.6 Using the allocated funding, counsellors have now been employed to create an in-house service which is located within Child Health. The appointed team leader is fulfilling this role on a 0.6 FTE basis, bringing significant experience of mental health and social work as well as direct experience of collaborating with educational establishments. 6.5 FTE counsellors registered with the BACP (or equivalent) are now in post. The Alcohol and Drug Partnership has also provided funding for an additional post, to ensure there is a dedicated resource for primary children from age 10 years onwards. This gives a total of 7.5 FTE counsellors to provide services for children and young people across our educational establishments.

4.7 A proportion of the funding has also been dedicated to support core services to provide professional time to embed, supervise and robustly evaluate the delivery of counselling through schools. In the longer term funding will also be

required to support travel and subsistence so that counselling is delivered equitably across school locations based on identification of individual need. In the short term counselling will be delivered remotely, with a mixed model of delivery moving forward.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 The effective collaboration across Education and the Health and Social Care Partnership has supported the development and delivery of this new and exciting school counselling service to meet the needs of children and young people across Argyll and Bute. Strong evaluative approaches have been built in from the outset, supported by a research assistant, to allow ongoing reporting on uptake and outcomes, both locally and to Scottish Government.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Policy - none
6.2 Financial – funding provided from Scottish Government
6.3 Legal – none
6.4 HR – counsellors are employed within Child Health
6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty - equity and accessibility are key considerations for delivery
6.5.1 Equalities: protected characteristics – accessible to all
6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – considered through wellbeing indicators
6.5.3 Islands – the service will be distributed equitably including to island locations
6.6. Risk – Scottish Government funding fixed term
6.7 Customer Service - none

Douglas Hendry, Executive Director with responsibility for Education

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21 January 2021

APPENDICES
Appendix 1 – Handbook for schools