

# Minute

## Education, Leisure and Housing Committee

Wednesday, 5 February 2025, 09:30.

Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Place, Kirkwall.



### Present

Councillors Gwenda M Shearer, Ivan A Taylor, Graham A Bevan, Stephen G Clackson, Alexander G Cowie, David Dawson, Steven B Heddle, James R Moar, John A R Scott, Jean E Stevenson and Heather N Woodbridge.

### Teacher Representative:

Jo Hill.

### Present via remote link (Microsoft Teams)

Councillor Janette A Park.

### Clerk

- Sandra Craigie, Committees Officer.

### In Attendance

- James Wylie, Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing.
- Peter Diamond, Head of Education.
- Frances Troup, Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing.
- Garry Burton, Service Manager (Leisure and Culture).
- Catherine Diamond, Service Manager (Early Learning and Childcare).
- Morag Miller, Service Manager (Primary Education).
- Lesley Mulraine, Service Manager (Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation).
- Pat Robinson, Service Manager (Accounting).
- Kerry Spence, Service Manager (Community Learning, Development and Employability).
- Nigel Fyffe, Team Manager (Maintenance and Heritage) (for Items 1 to 5).
- Katell Roche, Team Manager (Sport and Leisure) (for Items 5 to 9).
- Georgette Herd, Solicitor.

### In Attendance via remote link (Microsoft Teams)

- Seonaidh McDonald, Principal, UHI Orkney (for Item 1).

## **Observing**

- Jane Partridge, Service Manager (Secondary and Tertiary Education).
- Siobhan Wilks, Service Manager (Support for Learning and Inclusion).
- Ashleigh Gillespie, Senior Human Resources Adviser.

## **Apologies**

- Reverend Susan Kirkbride, Religious Representative.
- Reverend Fraser Macnaughton, Religious Representative.
- Mary Maley, Teacher Representative.

## **Declarations of Interest**

- No declarations of interest were intimated.

## **Chair**

- Councillor Gwenda M Shearer.

## **1. Revenue Expenditure Monitoring**

After consideration of a report by the Head of Finance, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Accounting), the Committee:

Noted:

**1.1.** The revenue expenditure monitoring statement in respect of service areas for which the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee was responsible, for the period 1 April to 31 December 2024, attached as Annex 1 to the report by the Head of Finance, indicating a net budget overspend position of £265,100, comprising the following:

- Underspend of £464,400 against General Fund services.
- Overspend of £729,500 against Non-General Fund services.

**1.2.** The revenue financial detail by service area statement in respect of service areas for which the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee was responsible, for the period 1 April to 31 December 2024, attached as Annex 2 to the report by the Head of Finance.

The Committee scrutinised:

**1.3.** The explanations given and actions proposed in respect of significant budget variances, as outlined in the Budget Action Plan, attached as Annex 3 to the report by the Head of Finance, and obtained assurance that appropriate action was being taken with regard to significant budget variances.

## **2. Housing Revenue Account**

### **Revenue Repairs and Maintenance Programmes – Expenditure Monitoring**

After consideration of a report by the Head of Finance, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Accounting), the Committee:

Noted:

**2.1.** The summary position of expenditure incurred, as at 31 December 2024, against the approved Housing Revenue Account revenue repairs and maintenance programme for 2024/25, as detailed in section 1.4 of the report by the Head of Finance.

The Committee scrutinised:

**2.2.** The detailed analysis of expenditure figures and programme updates, attached as Appendix 1 to the report by the Head of Finance, and obtained assurance regarding significant budget variances and progress being made with delivery of the approved Housing Revenue Account revenue repairs and maintenance programme.

## **3. Housing Service – Performance Monitoring**

After consideration of a report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation), the Committee:

Scrutinised the Housing Service's benchmarked performance in relation to other councils and Housing Associations within its peer group, attached as Appendix 1 to the report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, and obtained assurance with regard to the performance of the Housing Service.

Councillor Stephen G Clackson joined the meeting during discussion of this item.

## **4. Care Inspectorate – Stromness Primary School Nursery**

After consideration of a report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Early Learning and Childcare), the Committee:

Scrutinised the inspection report in respect of Stromness Primary School Nursery, attached as Appendix 1 to the report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, and obtained assurance.

## 5. Papdale Halls of Residence – Inspection Report

After consideration of a report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation), the Committee:

Scrutinised the inspection of the School Care Accommodation Services at Papdale Halls of Residence undertaken by the Care Inspectorate, together with the Action Plan, attached as Appendices 1 and 2 respectively to the report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, and obtained assurance that action had been agreed and/or taken where appropriate.

## 6. Composite Class Policy

After consideration of a report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, together with an Equality Impact Assessment and an Island Communities Impact Assessment, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Primary Education), the Committee:

Resolved to **recommend to the Council** that the Composite Class Policy, attached as Appendix 1 to this Minute, be approved.

## 7. COVID-19 Play Park Equipment Renewal Funding

After consideration of a report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Team Manager (Sport and Leisure), the Committee:

Noted:

**7.1.** That an unallocated balance of £129,087 remained within the Play Park Equipment Renewal Fund established in 2021.

The Committee resolved to **recommend to the Council**:

**7.2.** That the following allocations be made from the unallocated balance in the Play Park Equipment Renewal Fund:

- £50,000 towards establishing a Play Park and Open Space annual maintenance budget of £10,000 per year for five years.
- The remaining unallocated balance, amounting to £79,087, to be used to upgrade equipment in Council play areas and open spaces in line with the Council's Play Area Strategy.

**7.3.** That powers be delegated to the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing to determine spend from the remaining unallocated balance of £79,097, referred to above, on Council play areas and open spaces.

## **8. Council House Rents**

After consideration of a report by the Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation), the Committee:

Resolved to **recommend to the Council** that, in recognition that the cost of living was continuing to have a significant impact on households and therefore there was a need to keep rents affordable, Council house rents for the undernoted three-year period should increase with effect from 1 April annually as follows:

- 2025/26 – 4% increase.
- 2026/27 – 4% increase.
- 2027/28 – 2.5% increase.

## **9. Conclusion of Meeting**

At 12:02 the Chair declared the meeting concluded.

Signed: Gwenda M Shearer.



**Education, Leisure and Housing**

# **Composite Class Policy**

**Version Control**

<b>Document Reference.</b>	<b>Revision.</b>	<b>Issue Date.</b>	<b>Reason for Issue.</b>	<b>Reviewer.</b>	<b>Sign.</b>
ELH032.	00.	December 2024	New Policy – Previously Guidance Notes.	Service Manager (Primary Education)	

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## **Composite classes in primary schools in Orkney**

This policy is intended to support primary schools in Orkney in the structuring of Primary School classes. It outlines the process which should be followed as part of the annual exercise to review class make up and staffing in line with Orkney Islands Council's staffing policy.

Each academic session, a staffing exercise is used to identify the number of teachers allocated to each primary school for the following academic session, based on the total number of children on the roll for each school and the number of primary classes required. It is then the responsibility of the headteacher to group children into classes to make the best use of the available teachers and classrooms in meeting the needs of all learners across the school. This may have to include the formation of composite classes.

To engage and challenge children, allowing them to attain and achieve in line with their potential, schools will organise their children in a range of groupings for various purposes. Staff in school will ensure that children will work within a learning programme appropriate for their age, ability and aptitude. Curriculum for Excellence guidelines require that every pupil should have learning experiences which are appropriate to their own level of development. This applies whether children are in a composite class or a single year group class.

### **Criteria for composite classes**

Orkney Islands Council recognises that the Head Teacher and staff of each school are best placed to make decisions about the most appropriate class arrangements in their schools, taking into account the needs of all children. It is therefore the responsibility of the Head Teacher to manage the class organisation for their school. In reaching decisions about the allocation of children to classes, Head Teachers will consult with all relevant and directly involved staff. They will also communicate with parents and the Parent Council.

The headteacher will make the decision on how best to organise classes applying the following criteria:

- Each composite class shall have a maximum of 25 children as per national guidance.
- The lead factor in determining the population of the composite class will be the date of birth of the child, ie the oldest children from the younger stage join with the youngest children from the older stage.
- A reasonable balance in terms of gender, where possible.
- The range of Additional Support Needs spread reasonably across classes.
- Across the school, headteachers are asked to ensure that they keep a small number of 'spaces' for each year group in the event that new families move into the catchment area of the school during the school session. Where possible, it is recommended that at least 2 spaces for each year group should be kept. This forms part of the whole school class structure. It may not always be possible to keep 2 spaces, but as a minimum 1 space should, where possible, be kept.

- Schools will not usually be able to organise classes where 1 year group is full, if there are alternative composite arrangements that can be made across the school. On a very occasional basis, a school may have to open with one year group full. Where this happens, this will be with the agreement of the local authority.

This criterion of age is used because it is unambiguous and transparent: for the purposes of school provision, age is not a 'protected characteristic' in the Equality Act 2010. This means that in relation to the provision of education, schools may lawfully use the criteria of age to organise classes.

There may be occasions where class sizes across the school are almost at their maximum. On these occasions, placing requests from parents outwith the catchment area are likely to be refused, as the local authority would possibly have to put in additional staffing to meet the increased school roll.

When children join during the year, it may be that a class year group may have already become full. When this happens, a child may be placed in a different class, or a new composite may be created, until the school year is finished and the opportunity to review all classes happens again. This should then be reviewed to follow the criteria contained in this policy for the class composition in the new academic year.

In schools where the school roll is 25 children or less, the challenge of teaching a multi-stage composite of up to 25 children in one class, covering all age groups from P1-P7 is recognised. As a result, the 'OIC primary staffing policy' will determine the number of children required before two classes are established. For schools of this size, the local staffing policy will apply in determining the number of classes in the school and not the national composite class size of 25.

## **Parental Engagement**

Whilst it is a common occurrence, changing classes can sometimes be a source of anxiety for parents/carers and children.

Parents/carers should be made aware of the organisation of the structure of classes and the real possibility of composite classes from first enrolling in school eg. through the school handbook. They should be made aware of the reasons why a composite class would be required, and that teaching and learning approaches will ensure the class structure does not impact adversely on learning.

There are many forms of parental engagement. In addition to working through Parent Councils, schools may choose to communicate via newsletters and other opportunities for communicating information about composite classes.

When engaging with parents and carers, headteachers should make it clear that they are not consulting parents/carers on the formation or population of the composite class. They are informing parents/carers about the educational and management basis for the decision and seeking to reassure parents/carers if they have anxieties in relation to their own child(ren) or on a wider basis.

If a child with additional support needs is placed in a class outwith the age criteria, this should be shared with the parent/carer and the benefits to the child for that placement.

All parents/carers of children involved in the creation of composite classes should be informed of the class their child(ren) will be placed in. If a parent or carer has a concern about the class allocation and the learning needs for their child, they should share that concern with the school's headteacher. The headteacher will explain how the school will organise teaching and learning to meet the needs of that child in the coming session.

The headteacher should also listen to parents/carers' concerns about specific matters, for example their children's friendships within previous and the prospective new cohorts and reassure them about how this will be monitored within the new arrangements.

Social groupings and friendships are not a criteria for creating composite classes.

Parents have a key role in positively supporting their children through the change of classes. Parents can support children by using this as an opportunity for children to make new friends and work with a wider range of children. Children are more adaptable than adults often give them credit for.

## **Support for Children**

Headteachers recognise that change can be unsettling for some children, and they will work with class teachers and other staff to talk to children about moving classes, providing reassurance and addressing any concerns that children may have.

Where possible, schools should arrange an opportunity for 'new' classes to get together in some way prior to the summer break. This is especially relevant where classes are having to change across the school. Commonly, schools organise a 'moving up' time towards the end of term 4. This is not always possible.

Children will be supported through the transition process with wellbeing check-ins during the first few weeks of the new term. Throughout the year, there are opportunities for whole year groups to be together for example, at break and lunch times. This allows for the retention of existing friendships along with the formation of new relationships.

Families of children with additional support needs will have the opportunity to discuss and prepare for any changes that may affect them through the Child/Young Person Planning Process.

## **Parent/carer concerns about class organisation and allocation**

In the event of a disagreement between parents/carers and the school about class allocation, parents/carers can raise this with Orkney Islands Council through the complaints process. Before raising this with Orkney Islands Council, parents/carers must first have raised the issue with the headteacher.

If having done all of the above, a parent or carer continues to be of the view that a headteacher has not followed the appropriate policy in structuring the classes in the school, this will be reviewed through the Orkney Islands Council complaints policy and procedures.

Orkney Islands Council will only over-rule a head teacher's decision if the criteria for class organisation does not comply with this policy.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What learning opportunities will my child experience?**

Children in all classes will follow programmes constructed to help them progress at their own level, regardless of whether or not they are in a composite or single stage class. Teachers often group pupils of similar learning ability for some elements of learning and teaching purposes in classes and are trained to adapt their teaching methods to meet the needs of all pupils. Every class contains pupils of a wide range of different abilities.

### **My child has been put into a composite class with pupils from the stage below. Is he/she being kept back?**

No, this is certainly not the case. Children will progress through learning experiences tailored to fit their personal level of attainment.

### **What if my child's friends are in another class?**

You should be assured that your child's teacher will be sensitive to the needs of all children in his/her class and will be encouraging the pupils to develop good working relationships and friendships. Children usually make new friends very quickly and can cope far better with change than adults imagine. Pupils will also spend time in the playground mixing with all of the school's other pupils.

### **Will my child always be in a composite class?**

Not necessarily. The need for composite classes changes as the roll of the school fluctuates. Scottish Government guidance sets maximum registration class sizes for P1 at 25 children, for P2 and P3 at 30 children, and for P4-P7 at 33 children. Each year staffing and class formations are reviewed by the head teacher and the Council. In some schools there are no single stage classes and pupils will move through the whole primary school in composite classes. Sometimes, these classes have to be changed as the pupils will have to change classes from year to year.

A child placed in any class will not necessarily progress through school with the same group of pupils, as the class organisation may change. This can result from pupil numbers changing at particular stages, or from the different maximum class sizes that can be formed at different stages.

There is no evidence to support the view that composite classes affect attainment adversely.

**Can I refuse to have my child taught in a composite class?**

No. The management of class organisation in schools is the responsibility of the head teacher. Where there are specific concerns about a child's learning or progress, schools have systems for consulting and communicating with individual parents on a regular basis as necessary.

**Can I ask for my child to be placed in a different class?**

No. The management of class organisation in schools is the responsibility of the head teacher. The authority will only over-rule a head teacher's decision if the criteria for class organisation does not comply with this policy.