Local Government Committee

25th Meeting, 2002

Tuesday 8 October 2002

The Committee will meet at 10.00 am in Highland Council Chambers, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness.

1. **Items in private:** The Committee will consider whether to take items 3, 4, 5 and 6 in private.

2. **Renewing Local Democracy - Phase 2 Inquiry:** The Committee will take evidence from—

   Arthur McCourt, Chief Executive, Highland Council
   Councillor David Alston, Chairman, Renewing Democracy and Community Planning Select Committee, Highland Council;

   Mike Baughan, Chief Executive, Learning and Teaching Scotland
   Colin McAndrew, Principal Curriculum Officer, Learning and Teaching Scotland.

3. **Budget Process 2003-04:** The Committee will consider proposals for consideration of Stage 2 of the Budget Process 2003-04.

4. **Building (Scotland) Bill:** The Committee will consider proposals for consideration of the Bill at Stage 1.

5. **Mental Health (Scotland) Bill:** The Committee will consider further proposals for witnesses at Stage 1.

6. **Dog Fouling (Scotland) Bill:** The Committee will consider further proposals for witnesses at Stage 1.

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The following papers are attached for this meeting:

**Agenda item 2**
Submission from Highland Council  
Submission from Learning and Teaching Scotland

**Agenda item 3**
Budget Process 2003-04 - Paper from the Adviser [PRIVATE]

**Agenda Item 4**
Building (Scotland) Bill – Paper from the Convener [PRIVATE]

**Agenda Item 5**
Mental Health (Scotland) Bill – Paper from the Clerk [PRIVATE]

**Agenda Item 6**
Dog Fouling Bill – Paper from the Clerk [PRIVATE]
Scottish Parliament Local Government Committee
Inverness 8 October

“Renewing Local Democracy”

Submission in relation to:-

- widening access to council membership for under represented groups, in particular young people and the role of civic education in attracting candidates to stand; and
- the provision of support for councillors in terms of administrative support packages, support within constituencies and training programmes.

Widening Access for Young People

The Highland Council has targeted efforts to attract under represented groups and develop civic education at young people. Together with its Highland Wellbeing Alliance partners, the council has established Highland Youth Voice, the first elected youth parliament in Scotland. This is part of a wider programme of youth participation activities that includes support for community youth forums, pupil councils and the Scottish Youth Parliament.

The Highland Youth Voice was first elected in October 2000 and the second elections are due to be held in the week of the committee’s visit. All secondary schools participate in the elections, many doing so electronically via a website developed in partnership with the International Teledemocracy Centre of Napier University. The website has been further developed to support the Youth Voice with news sections, discussion forums to support parliament debates and provision to post election manifests.

The youth parliamentarians have been involved in a wide range of activities with the Wellbeing Alliance partners and have made representations at ministerial level and to the council. They have taken forward a number of projects related to their priority concerns of drugs, transport and sexuality including a leaflet and adverts on drugs issues and a scheme to offer young people advanced driving lessons.

Pupil Councils are another fast developing area of youth participation operating in both primary and secondary schools. Pupil Councils have been involved in a number of innovative projects related to health promotion and bullying.

As well as being part of our overall youth strategy to make Highland the best part of Scotland in which to be young, this work aims to encourage a sense of civic responsibility in young people, to help them understand what it means to play a role in public life and to encourage a positive attitude to local government and the election process.
Involving Communities in the work of the Council

Our Working with Communities Strategy underpins the Council’s approach to involving communities in its work. The Renewing Democracy and Community Planning Select Committee, chaired by Councillor David Alston has responsibility for developing policy and demonstrating leadership in this area. Some of the practical expressions of the Working with Communities Strategy include:

- Our support for Community Councils, who are seen as key consultees in many areas of the Council’s work. The council allocates over £150k annually to individual Community Councils and is promoting the use of postal ballots for elections and the use of ICT to help community councils fulfil their roles.
- Our annual performance survey seeking the views of the public on the council’s performance is now issued to over 5000 members of the public across the Highlands and is aimed at increasing our accountability and responsiveness and well as increasing public awareness of what the council does.
- Our support for user involvement in service planning is central to widening access. For example, the council’s support for Highland Community Care Forum providing support and advocacy for clients and carers is an area of good practice which is now being replicated in the field of children’s services with the Highland Children’s Forum.
- Our development of aspects of e-democracy. All members have access to the most up to date ICT equipment and all minutes and agendas for council business are on line to the general public as well. The council has developed public discussion forums on its own website and two partner sites HighlandYouthVoice.org and Think-Net.org which deals with long term strategic issues for the Highlands.

Supporting elected members

There are 80 councillors elected to the Highland Council serving a population of 208,000 people in an area of 10,000 sq miles. Approximately half the population live in urban settlements and half in rural areas, with a quarter of the population living in settlements of less than 1,000 people.

This geography and the mix of urban and rural communities presents challenges for the delivery of services and for members carrying out their duties. The Council operates a decentralised system of operational management and local political decision making to bring decision making and political accountability close to the communities we serve. Strategic decisions about resource allocation and policy making are reserved to the Council and its strategic committees which meet in Inverness in six cycles per annum.

Despite this decentralised structure, extensive distances are travelled by members to attend committee meetings at both HQ and area. This, together with the fact that half of the council’s members serve rural areas means that the council has attempted to support members in a variety of ways which are flexible enough to meet their individual circumstances in their wards, at area level and at HQ level.
A further factor which influences the way support is provided to members is that the Council is Independent and does not organise its Committees along party political lines. There is therefore no support structure for political groups. Support is based on the needs of individual members.

**PC’s and other Technology** Effective ICT plays a significant part in serving members needs.

- PC’s or laptops for home use with access to the Council’s e-mail system and intranet are available for all members. 75 out of the 80 members have taken up this facility with 58 members also having internet access via the Council’s system. Initial training is provided together with follow up training and a “drop-in clinic” for problem solving is provided on Council meeting days.
- Member accommodation at HQ includes a members library and office facilities with 18 network points for laptops. There are also PCs in the members library profiled for a number of members who wish to use them.
- All Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on-line as part of the Council Minutes and Agendas Online project.
- Three pilots are underway to enhance member use of ICT: firstly, a secure member discussion forum is being piloted on the Council’s intranet site; secondly, a “mobile assistant” pilot which provides a secretarial service via mobile phone is being piloted for office-bearers and senior staff for out of office hours; and thirdly, voice recognition software is currently in place for one member who has manual dexterity difficulties.
- A pilot video conferencing project on five sites is underway in anticipation of the provisions of the forthcoming Local Government legislation allowing the video conferencing of formal meetings.

**Secretarial and administrative support** Along with the use of ICT, there remains the need for traditional secretarial and administrative support.

- A full time Member’s Services Assistant undertakes secretarial and administrative tasks for elected members at HQ. This is supplemented by secretarial back up and accommodation for interviews, surgeries etc at the Council’s eight Area Offices and network of 36 Service Points. The network of service points provide the first point of contact for the public for all queries, complaints and requests for service. They provide an important resource for members who wish to use them to report and track constituents queries, complaints and problems.
- Because of the extensive geography of the Highlands, it is not always convenient for members to deal with constituent’s queries through the above routes and some members prefer not to use the ICT facilities available to them. In these circumstances, the Council provides for the reimbursement of secretarial expenses up to £1200 per annum. 30 members availed themselves of this provision in 2001/2.

**Training and development** is perhaps the least well developed and most difficult area of providing support for elected members.
• Familiarisation training and briefings are provided at the start of each term for newly elected members. This is complemented by in house training opportunities provided by the Council’s training and development team dealing with issues such as “managing the media”, “assertiveness and negotiation”, “understanding local government finance”, “managing meetings” and “rapid reading”. Members who are involved in recruitment are required to undertake training in “recruitment and selection processes”. In 2001/2 fifty training days were taken up by members.

• The Council’s training and development team was a partner in the COSLA initiative to develop an SQA certificated personal development award for elected members. Progress, has however, been limited and only 2 members have completed a unit. No members from partner councils have completed a unit.

This submission focuses on three aspects of the work of the Highland Council which we believe contribute in different ways towards engaging communities and specifically, young people, in civic society and provide the kind of resources which help elected members to be able to carry out their roles in a large rural area.

Arthur D. McCourt
Chief Executive
The Highland Council

2 October 2002
Submission from Learning and Teaching Scotland
The Committee has requested Learning and Teaching Scotland to submit written
evidence in advance of its meeting on 8 October. Further oral evidence will be provided
on the day. The committee is specifically requesting LT Scotland to provide views on ‘the
role of civic education and how it can be utilised to attract future and potential candidates
to stand for election’.

1.0 Learning and Teaching Scotland
1.1 Learning and Teaching Scotland (LT Scotland) is a Non Departmental Public Body
(NDPB) sponsored by the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED). LT
Scotland is charged with providing advice, support, resources and staff development
which enhances the quality of educational experience with a view to improving
attainment and achievement and promoting lifelong learning.

1.2 The remit covers all matters relating to the curriculum in the pre-school, primary and
secondary education sectors in Scotland. LT Scotland is required to advise the
Scottish Executive on any aspects of the learning experiences of young people to
age 18, and on any issue that may have an effect on those learning experiences.
Guidance and support on the curriculum are also provided to schools, local
education authorities and others. As part of the wider education community, LT
Scotland works closely with other sectors e.g. further and higher education, ICT
providers, business, the public sector generally and voluntary bodies and groups.

2.0 Education for Citizenship in Scotland – a Paper for Discussion and
Development
(Copies of the paper have been provided for distribution to members of the
committee in advance of the meeting)

2.1 The Advisory Council of the former Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum
(SCCC), now merged within LT Scotland, was requested late in 1999 to set up a
national review group, chaired by Professor Pamela Munn, to produce guidance on
education for citizenship. There was extensive public consultation (written
submissions, conferences, electronic means, young people) on the draft report from
September 2000 – March 2001 and final advice was submitted to Scottish Executive
Ministers for consideration by December 2001.

2.2 The resulting paper, Education for Citizenship in Scotland - a Paper for Discussion
and Development was launched on June 7th by Deputy Minister for Education and
Children, Nicol Stephen. To date over 13,000 copies of the paper have been
distributed in Scotland and beyond. The paper and additional resources (including
materials for teachers to use with pupils on ‘participation in decision-making’) can
also be accessed electronically on www.ltscotland.com/citizenship

2.3 The report forms the basis of a national framework for education for citizenship from
the ages of 3 to 18 and is endorsed by Scottish Executive Ministers. The broad
definition and approach adopted in the paper have been welcomed across different
sectors of formal education and by voluntary and community organisations.
3.0 The Introduction (pp2) to Education for Citizenship in Scotland makes clear its context. For ease of reference, the Introduction is reproduced below.

3.1 ‘Schools and other educational establishments have a central part to play in educating young people for life as active and responsible members of their communities. They share this role with families and others, and must work in partnership with them to provide young people with learning opportunities that contribute to their development as citizens.

3.2 The advent of the Scottish Parliament has encouraged a fresh focus on the importance of people living in Scotland being able to understand and participate in democratic processes. If greater national autonomy is to be matched by an enhanced sense of social and political responsibility in the population, young people need opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will allow them to take that responsibility. This is recognised in the national priorities for education whose status is established in the Standards in Scotland’s Schools, etc. Act 2000. Schools are encouraged to ‘work with parents to teach pupils respect for self and one another and their interdependence with other members of their neighbourhood and society and to teach them the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society’. In this sense education for citizenship should empower young people to participate thoughtfully and responsibly in community and civic life.

3.3 There is growing concern, throughout the UK, to work towards a more inclusive society where inequities are addressed effectively and cultural and community diversity is celebrated. Ways and means are being sought to tackle disaffection and disengagement from society and, more broadly, to address issues of social injustice and of personal identity. At the same time there is evidence of growing scepticism about traditional structures of representative democracy and the forms of political activity associated with them. By contrast, participation in single-issue pressure groups, and organisations concerned with, for example, consumer issues, human rights and sustainable development, has increased in recent years.

3.4 Scotland and the rest of the UK exist in a rapidly changing wider world. A growing sense of the interconnectedness of peoples and places is affecting individuals and societies – economically, environmentally, culturally and politically. This process of ‘globalisation’ is being further promoted by the ongoing revolution in information and communications technology (ICT). Multinational corporations exert increasing influence over national economies and cultures through their investment decisions and their marketing of products and services. The European Union continues to evolve, and to influence our political, legal and economic institutions. At the same time, inequalities between the economically rich and poor seem to be increasing. International and global trends create social pressures as well as opening opportunities for individuals and society. They raise fresh issues about the distribution of power and the extent to which individuals, local communities, territorial states and business corporations have influence over a host of social, economic and environmental matters. The complexity of modern society and the magnitude of the changes taking place within it sometimes threaten to overwhelm individuals. People doubt their ability to influence events, but remain troubled by the manifestations of social stress they experience or see reported in the media.
3.5 It is important to take due account of this changing context when considering afresh the purposes and goals of education – both formal and informal – in Scotland. The main contention of this paper is that young people’s education in school and early education settings has a key role to play in fostering a modern, democratic society, whose members have a clear sense of identity and belonging, feel empowered to participate effectively in their communities and recognise their roles and responsibilities as global citizens.’

4.0 The overall goal for education for citizenship is stated in the paper (cf pp7) as follows:

4.1 ‘Education for citizenship should aim to develop capability for thoughtful and responsible participation in political, economic, social and cultural life. This capability is rooted in knowledge and understanding, in a range of generic skills and competences, including ‘core skills’, and in a variety of personal qualities and dispositions. It finds expression through creative and enterprising approaches to issues and problems.

4.2 Being a capable citizen is not just about possessing knowledge and skills. It is about being able and willing to use knowledge and skills to make decisions and, where appropriate, take action. Nor is effective citizenship just about having the capacity and disposition to be active. It is about being able to take action and make things happen for ends – and by means – that are infused with respect and care for people and a sense of social and environmental responsibility. Equally, a reasoned decision by an individual not to take action is a legitimate personal choice.

4.3 Capability for citizenship encompasses social, economic and cultural ‘literacies’ coupled with the capacity for participation in all aspects of society – economic, social and cultural. Finally, and importantly, capability for citizenship, as envisaged here, also includes ideas about ‘political literacy’.

4.4 Key aspects of capability for citizenship, include studies within specific curricular areas, cross-curricular activities, opportunities for young people to participate in decision making, and improved school-community links. These are exemplified in some detail in Section 3.5 of the paper Progression in education for citizenship which includes numerous case studies of effective practice from a range of educational establishments.

4.5 It should be noted that the paper does not recommend a new subject ‘citizenship’ to be added to the school curriculum in Scotland (as has been the case in the English and Welsh national curriculum) but that the learning outcomes sought should be achieved within existing and developing curriculum structures.

4.6 The paper is underpinned by the belief that education for citizenship for young people is most effective when they learn by being active citizens; that schools should themselves model a democratic and participatory society and pupils should take on responsibilities and exercise informed choice. Secondly, the development of capability for citizenship should be fostered in ways that motivate young people to be active and responsible members of their communities – local, national and global.
Education for citizenship entails building bridges and developing interconnections between school or early years centre and community, to give young people opportunities to develop knowledge, understanding and care for the wider world.

4.7 In conclusion, *Education for Citizenship in Scotland* provides a national conceptual basis arrived at by consensus; it offers policy leadership and direction; and it has become in a short time the main reference point for the wide range of stakeholders in education in Scotland to engage in a shared dialogue, discussion and development.

5.0 National Priorities for Education
The explicit inclusion of 'Values and Citizenship' within the National Priorities Improvement Framework is a clear indication to the educational community of their importance. Arguably 'values and citizenship' is also a cross-cutting concern across all five national priorities if the objective is to produce a generation who are knowledgeable, skilled, and are well disposed and motivated to play a full part in their communities. LT Scotland is supporting the implementation of the framework across Scotland through a dedicated team of development officers working closely with Local Councils.

6.0 Participation and Involvement
There is an increasingly held view that young people are the drivers of change. Consulting with young people has become a matter of statutory instrument and accepted good practice. The topic of pupils' voices and rights was widely discussed during the evidence-gathering phase for the National Debate on Education.

6.1 Throughout Scotland there are increasing mechanisms in place for young people to be involved through participation in schools and local council managed youth councils and forums. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has an important role in promoting forms of participation and informed debate. The Scottish Youth Summit of 2000 brought young people together with national politicians to discuss a wide range of issues concerning them. The Scottish Youth Parliament matures alongside its ‘adult’ counterpart. The roll-out of the national programme Dialogue Youth managed by Young Scot is a sizeable investment in youth participation.

6.2 LT Scotland has just completed work with the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body to produce a video *Let’s Do Democracy* explaining the functions of the Parliament and how young people can become involved. This will be launched at the end of October.

6.3 Many schools have formed effective working relationships with their MSP, MP, MEP and Local Councillor. Teachers will normally prepare their pupils for meetings or ‘surgeries’ with Councillors in advance by discussing issues to be raised, how questions should be put and the meeting conducted, what the responsibilities of Councils are, and so on. These meetings are particularly appreciated by young people when their natural curiosity and limited prior experience of politics is recognised and responded to. The co-operation of local authorities, the Scottish Parliament and other national institutions offering stimulating and welcoming experiences when young people visit is also valued.
7.0 A Word of Caution

7.1 A significant challenge in national and in local projects and initiatives is to ensure that participation by young people is truly representative, and not restricted to the minority who ‘step forward’ readily and easily.

7.2 Equally, the risk should be acknowledged that in seeking the views of young people, if they feel that they are not listened to (or their opinions not acted on) the result could be further disillusionment and future disengagement with the existing structures.

7.3 The feelings in young people of being ‘part of the problem, not the solution’ may be intensified if consultation is perceived as tokenistic. Attitudes and perceptions may be difficult to measure, but they serve to caution educational policy-makers. This is highlighted in recent research:

“………. even where schools have put democratic structures in place, through such means as circle time and class, year and school councils, there can be a world of difference between what teachers describe as pupil involvement and the way pupils experience democracy on the ground.”


8.0 Conclusion

Encouragement of participation in political, economic, social and cultural life is the declared aim of education for citizenship. Young people should be encouraged to be well informed about contemporary issues, to make informed choices, to value the welfare of the communities to which they belong, and to consider the advantages and disadvantages of taking various kinds of responsible action. Their decisions must be their own. The specific issue of political candidacy is a matter for political parties to encourage not schools. Indeed there are a number of conventions with respect to school impartiality in respect of party politics which are valued, and which might make effective encouragement to increase party political involvement extremely difficult. Experience, however, suggests that where teachers and politicians of all parties work together in partnership to extend young people’s experience of political life, there are considerable gains in understanding, interest, self confidence and commitment to community interests to be made.

Colin McAndrew
Principal Curriculum Officer for
Chief Executive

27 September, 2002