

**Minutes of Bell's Brae Primary School Parent Council
Held in the Bell's Brae Primary School Staffroom
On Monday 13th February 2023 at 6.30pm**

Present

David Thomson	Chairperson
Laurie Pottinger	Vice Chair
Anne-Lise Anderson	Parent Member
Susan Liphthorpe	Parent Member
Shaun Garriock	Parent Member

In Attendance

Jennifer Wadley	Head Teacher
Cheryl Simpson	Depute Head Teacher
Vikki Morrison	Probationer
Dawn Ratter	Clerk/Treasurer
Stephen Leask	Councillor
Gary Robinson	Councillor
Robin Calder	Executive Manager – Quality Improvement

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Neil Pearson.

2. Approval of the previous minutes (Monday 28th November 2022)

The minutes of the last meeting were approved by Laurie Pottinger and seconded by Susan Liphthorpe.

3. Review of matters and actions arising from previous minutes

Road Safety

Cllr Leask asked if there were any actions outstanding around the proposed 20mph limits. He has been in discussion with residents around Gilbertson Road/St Sunniva Street and the general feeling is that the speed of traffic is an issue. David reported this issue has been ongoing for several years but priorities within the Roads department often change. Cllr Leask raised concerns regarding the speed of traffic along King Harald Street and the safety of children getting to school. David noted he keeps in contact with Neil Hutcheson during the school year but there is currently no further update.

4. Treasurer's Report (see attached)

The available balance is £3,286.19.

5. Staffing update

- Learning Support Worker 17.5 hpw (temporary) – candidate now in post.
- Learning Support Worker 18 hpw – candidate now in post.
- ELC Senior Practitioner – interviews will be held next week.
- Primary Teacher (temporary) – Ronan Bourke is now in post in P2.
- Learning Support Worker (temporary) – Awaiting to be shortlisted.
- PE Teacher (temporary) – Paula Chapman is currently covering this vacancy.
- Emotional Support Officer – the external funding for this post will cease in July. Jennifer has a meeting with Jane Cluness to evaluate the work Vicky has done during her time at Bell's Brae and to promote the benefits of having this role within the school.

To keep the Parent Council informed of the current fragility around staffing, Jennifer noted today there were 3 teacher absences which were covered internally. Last week, the school lost 61 days to absences of teaching and support staff. The school managed to get supply cover for 23 of these, with all other absences being covered internally. This was able to be covered internally due to high pupil absences at the same time.

Cllr Leask noted interest in the Emotional Support Officer role. Bell's Brae participated in a pilot with the Emotional Support Officer role in the school, and is the only school to have this type of role on a full time basis. Jennifer noted it has been extremely beneficial for the school. The post was created to support pupils who have experienced trauma. Jennifer said it hasn't only supported pupils but also raised the profile around the impact of trauma. All staff have had training on being trauma informed. This has given staff the confidence and support to speak more openly about trauma with pupils and families to see how they can provide adequate support. Vicky has provided a safe and secure place for pupils to come out of the class and speak if they want to speak, or have a break away from the classroom setting. There are no existing staff within the school who can provide this service. Cllr Leask asked if this is something that Jennifer can see progressing in the future. She advised that nothing will progress within Bell's Brae as an individual school but within the local authority there is a working group looking at how to move forward with support for childhood trauma. A parent asked if this is something that could be supported through Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). Jennifer advised that the role could be supported through this funding, if a school had enough PEF to cover the salary. The majority of PEF at Bell's Brae is used to support the Breakfast Club. Anchor for Families have staff who can offer support to pupils and families.

6. The review of the maximum class sizes criteria in primary schools/settings in Shetland Islands Council (Robin Calder, Executive Manager – Quality Improvement)

Robin Calder, Executive Manager – Quality Improvement attended the meeting to provide information on the current review of the maximum class sizes criteria in primary schools/settings in Shetland Islands Council. Robin explained they are at the start of the process of reviewing maximum class sizes criteria. A criteria has been in place since 2012, which covers primary schools from one to seven teacher schools. It sets out the number of pupils in a class and the number of teachers allocated to a school. Every year this is looked at and reviewed to determine if a school will be a one teacher, two teacher, etc. school for the new school year. Shetland Islands Council adheres to the Scottish Governments maximum class size criteria, e.g. for P1 there is a maximum of 25 children in one class, for a composite class the maximum is also 25. From P3-7 the maximum per single class is 33 pupils. This criteria matches with the national class size criteria.

The current position is that Shetland Islands Council have committed to reviewing the criteria, as part of the overall review, with a view to including all schools in the revised criteria. At the moment, Bell's Brae and Sound are not on the current criteria. Currently, every year Bell's Brae and Sound are appointed 14 teachers, including 2 probationers and regardless of the size of the school roll and any changes, it is a set number of 14 classes, 2 classes per year group.

The review is looking at all primary settings in Shetland. There are a number of reasons for this, one is when central officers have spent time in some schools/communities where there has been a reduction in the number of classes due to a reduction in the school roll, they have received some feedback and sometimes, some criticism that there is an unfairness, an inequity that some schools are having to reduce teachers and create some big composite classes of 25 pupils but Bell's Brae and Sound are not affected year on year. This has created a perception around equity. Robin acknowledged that parent members may have their own

views on the demands, challenges and size of the Bell's Brae and Shetland Islands Council are acutely aware of this. However, when they have been working through changes to schools this is a common response from parents, staff and school communities. Therefore this review is required, allied with the fact that the school rolls have fallen in both primary schools in Lerwick. Another reason for the review is the budget position. Children's Services have a growing gap between the money received from Scottish Government and the money required to be spent on resourcing and sustaining the school estate. Children's Services are facing a gap of over £2.3m for the next financial year and Shetland Islands Council are facing a gap of over £11m. When looking at potential savings, the class size criteria is part of that consideration.

For Bell's Brae this could mean a smaller number of classes overall within the school. It could mean that in some year groups, there is one class rather than two and it could potentially mean composite classes for some year groups. Robin emphasised that there are no significant changes planned overnight. They have had some discussions with the school management team, and are currently looking at the school rolls, the new P1 intake and the number of deferrals. The review will be done carefully and sensitively, and they want to involve parents and communities in the review. Given the local reporting around budgets, potential savings and the reference to class size criteria, Robin concluded by saying he was really keen to attend the meeting tonight to explain the situation to parent members and explain where the service is at and what happens next.

Question and Answer session:

- Cllr Leask referred to the earlier staffing update around the volume of staff sickness and the impact this was having on the teaching of the children. He asked if this will be taken into consideration when looking at the number of teachers for Bell's Brae?
Absolutely, this will be taken into consideration and will be dealt with in a sensitive manner. Robin noted he has been the link officer for Bell's Brae for a number of years and has supported the school quite closely during the pandemic and beyond the pandemic. He is acutely aware of the challenges the school have faced with regards to absences and the pressures on the school and staff. The context of the school has to be considered really carefully during the review.
- What are the terms of the review, timelines, etc?
Robin noted they do not envisage major changes for the school year 2023/24. They are only at the beginning of the review, and this needs to be done very sensitively, with time to develop a criteria and understand the implications for Bell's Brae. In terms of timeframe thereafter, Children's Services under the direction of the strategic leadership of the Council and Councillors, has been asked to look at a range of potentials savings and efficiencies. They have been asked to review the secondary curriculum, the provision of swimming within the PE curriculum and this is another review. They have also been asked to review catering and cleaning and clerical to address the budget gap. Robin would envisage ongoing discussions next session and to clarify a revised criteria and what that means for Bell's Brae, involving the school community in that.
- How will the review take into account the uniqueness of Bell's Brae, in regards to the permanent ASN Department?
Robin noted this will be considered really carefully as the criteria is developed. They will continue discussions with the school management team and staff in the ASN department. They will be working closely with the central inclusion team within Children's Services who are acutely aware of the potential implications of changes with the number of classes and what that means for additional support needs

provision. They will also be looking at schools across the Northern Alliance, other local authorities within the north of Scotland. He said they are interested to know what criteria they have for schools beyond 7 classes and how they manage to work with that. Previously, the focus in Shetland has been on the schools with 1-7 teachers, with Lerwick primary schools always having 14 classes, regardless of class sizes and school roll numbers.

- How will the criteria ensure the ASN department will continue to be treated as an integral part of the school? If this is encompassed in the criteria, Bell's Brae will still be different from all other schools.

Cllr Robinson noted he would not envisage a change in the treatment of ASN pupils being part of mainstream classes as well as the ASN department, as this is exactly what the Scottish Government are promoting.

- Will the criteria take into account the level of support staff required for each individual year group/class?

The schools exact additional support needs staffing complement is determined annually through the additional support needs audit, looking at the cohort of young people and cross-referencing their needs, support requirements and meeting their outcomes. All schools are part of this audit and this defines the number of support staff required. If Bell's Brae was to move towards single year groups with bigger classes, this would have to be taken into account with the additional support needs audit and the demands on teachers with having all the learners in one class and this may precipitate more support in terms of the staff in the class. Clearly the financial position is very challenging and ASN staffing is being protected, with no commitment to reduce ASN staffing. A review of the class size criteria has to look at the composition of the pupils in the class and the level of support required to support them. This will be a careful process.

- If classes are combined into one class per year group, will you end up in a position where you have 2 support staff from each class in the one larger class, resulting in a teacher and 4 support staff? How will this affect the teaching of the class, will support staff end up teaching some individual pupils?

Ultimately, the school is allocated a certain amount of support staff and it is up to the school management team to determine which classes the support staff are assigned to. Jennifer advised the teacher would always be the teacher in the classroom and be in charge of leading the class and advising the support staff. With the ASN department, it is really fluid. A pupil from the ASN department might have 2 support staff accompanying them to a mainstream class but they might only be in the class for 30 minutes, depending on the needs of the child. The teacher would always be in charge of the curriculum and guiding the support staff on where or how they are needed. Jennifer would not envisage ever having 5 adults in one class.

- With a high number of placing requests at Bell's Brae, how will this be considered in the criteria?

In the current criteria there is a provision called 'reserved places'. If you are a 5 teacher school you would have 5 reserved places, if you are a 7 teacher school you have 7 reserved places. This means if you have a new pupil move into the catchment area, there is the flexibility in the criteria to accommodate that fluid school roll. Generally decisions on class sizes/teacher numbers are made as late in the school term as possible to see what the situation is with regards to placing requests. The Admissions Policy, approved by Shetland Islands Council, guides Children's Services on placing requests. If a placing request is received during a school year which would

deem a new teacher to be appointed, this would be grounds for a refusal. Any new criteria would contain a number of reserved places.

- With the reducing school roll, how many teachers do you envisage the school losing? *Robin confirmed they are not at this stage yet. There is a lot to take into consideration. They need to look at the existing criteria that only goes up to 7 teacher schools and see what the criteria will mean beyond 7 teacher school. The new criteria will also need to take into account the point raised tonight with regards to the additional support department and some fact finding around schools in the north of Scotland. There will not be any significant changes for 2023/24, this will be a medium to longer term exploration.*
- Whether there is a relatively small change in the number of pupils, any change in the level of teaching in the school is going to have a considerable impact on the schools ability to cope with the current educational challenges with regards to covering classes. If teacher numbers come down, then there will be a greater demand on supply. How will this be addressed to prevent service collapse? *The supply issue is really difficult and challenging for all schools. There is a lack of people on the supply list. With the diverse school estate in Shetland, a number of schools are concerned about the lack of supply staff available. Shetland Islands Council are relying on retired teachers willing to come in to schools and cover absences. Robin noted they are currently recruiting some new supply teachers which will hopefully help. Children's Services are also looking at how supply staff is managed and moving towards a new system called ShiftPlan. This will put more responsibility on the supply member of staff to record their availability on the app and the Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher can select from the list of available staff. Robin noted they need more teachers on the system. There has been some success lately with recruiting teachers from outwith Shetland. A lot of authorities have recruitment freezes which means teachers are looking further afield for employment opportunities. A couple of years ago there was a programme called 'Growing Our Own Teachers' where suitably qualified SIC staff to go into post graduate diploma in education through UHI Shetland. Children's Services are looking to run this programme again with a focus on primary and some hard to recruit secondary subjects. Hopefully this will reduce the issues with availability of staff.*
- How does this fit into the wider context of the Shetland Island Council's budget position with the ongoing reviews and the challenges with resourcing and sustaining the diverse school estate? *Cllr Robinson noted you need to look at the service you want to deliver and what can fit within the resources you have. It is really important to go through the process, leaving everything on the table. Shetland Islands Council did a zero based budgeting exercise a few years ago, which consisted of taking everything back to zero and building it back up, analysing everything that went back into the budget. This was very effective in finding savings. David asked what the likelihood of the strategic challenge getting further forward in the same timescale that you are looking for the outcomes of this type of reviews. In the absence of a strategic decision making process you will end up with a service that is viable but loses out on quality.*
- Where is the joined up thinking within Shetland Islands Council? Why is the Council looking to reduce teacher numbers when they also have plans to build more houses at Staneyhill which will increase the school roll at Bell's Brae? *If the school is on a criteria and the school roll increases, then teacher numbers will increase in line with the school roll.*

Laurie feels it is quite shocking that the local authority are considering composite class structures given the size of Bell's Brae, where there are good class sizes. Her personal view is that pupils will not get the same level of education in a composite class. There will be pupils that are further ahead, pupils who may be behind in some areas and the teacher would be caught up with the middle mass of pupils. She understands the need for composite classes in smaller schools. She also noted a class split will create irreparable damage to peer groups which may cause issues when the class is brought back together.

In summary, the key message is there are concerns, some are common which will be seen in other settings and some are specific concerns regarding how a criteria will affect Bell's Brae and how it operates due to the uniqueness of having a permanent ASN department. Critically, the parent council are concerned about how the very different aspects of Bell's Brae will be captured in a catch all criteria.

Robin would like to come back to a future meeting and keep the parent council updated, reflect on the feedback provided and show that they have listened to the views and concerns from presented tonight. The parent voice in Bell's Brae is really important in taking this review forward. The points tonight have been really helpful and will be reflected upon. Laurie noted appreciation to Robin for attending the meeting and listening to the views and concerns from parents. The review is expected to take the majority of this calendar year for a clearer position for the academic year 2024/25.

Robin left the meeting at 8.00pm.

David said it is great to have an insight into the review, the next challenge for the parent council will be how to engage with the wider parent forum around the review. Some suggestions were to send a newsletter to parents to introduce the topic or a bullet point summary of the points raised in the meeting posted on the Facebook page. Other suggestions were to have parent council representation at the parents evenings this week to engage with parents or to create a SurveyMonkey questionnaire to send to parents to gain feedback. Cllr Robinson noted a question for Robin would be to establish what the local authority are going to do to publicise the consultation. The parent council agreed to make an official response to Children's Services on the review, a discussion was held on how to make this response as good and robust as possible.

Cllr Robinson noted there are many things Shetland Islands Council do that they are not obliged to do, e.g. swimming in schools. The current position is very complex and the pressure on budgets at the moment should not be underestimated. The Councillors have some really tough decisions ahead of them. In many respects the Scottish Government reduces the funding to local authorities but not the expectations of what they expect Councils to deliver.

If any parent member has any questions they would like to raise, please email these to Dawn or David to be included in the next engagement process.

7. Next Social Events

The Christmas party was cancelled/postponed due to poor weather conditions in December. David noted any future social events will be key to engaging with parents in relation to the ongoing reviews.

There were a few suggestions: a dance/disco, quiz night, bingo night. All parent members are in agreement that a family night should be organised. There were some conversations around donations or tickets and whether a cost would limit some families from attending.

Another suggestion was to hold a social event around the time of the completion of the Gilbertson Park path. Parents could be encouraged to park at Gilbertson Park and walk to the school using the new path. Laurie will check when the works on the path is due to be completed.

ACTION: Laurie

David will email the social committee to see if there is an appetite to organise an event towards the end of Term 3, and then possibly an outdoor event in Term 4.

ACTION: David

8. Fundraising

As above.

9. Correspondence

All correspondence has been uploaded the Facebook page. David will share information on training for parent council members form Connect.

ACTION: David

10.AOCB

After School Clubs

A parent raised a query over after school clubs and asked if it would be possible for some clubs to be offered to younger pupils. Jennifer advised she can pass the query on to staff but also noted that it is difficult to find volunteers to run the after school clubs.

ACTION: Jennifer

Accordion Instructor

The interviews for a new Accordion Instructor will be held by Children's Services on Wednesday.

11.Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting will be Monday 15th May 2023 at 6.30pm.