

**Aboyne Academy Parent Council**  
**Minutes – Monday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

**Attendees:**

Office Bearers	Aboyne Academy	Parent Council Members	Parent Forum
Jenny Blair (Chair)	Michael Foy	Corri McHardy	Becki Redmond
Rob Brooker (Treasurer)	Claire Drewitt	Lynsey Harris	Fiona Walmsley
Rob Brooker (Deputy)	Bengt Evertsson	Jo Ellson	Sam McNulty
Charles Dunbar (Secretary)	Dougie Kinnear	Lorraine Chesney	Heather Davidson
		Natasha Pawlukiewicz	Jon Entwistle
Councillors			Jo E
Sarah Brown			Lorraine Chesney
			Tracey J

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

Jenny introduced everyone to the Parent Council.  
 Apologies: Petra McLeod (parent forum). Cllr Anouk Kloppert.

**2. Minutes of last meeting**

The minutes were approved.

**3. Chairperson’s Report**

(JB) Thanks to Rob and Natasha for getting the ship on the water for this year and getting myself and Charles Dunbar access behind the scenes to the FB page, email etc. Bank account, as ever with these things, will take a little longer but in Rob’s capable hands. I’ve spent quite a lot of time approving all the outstanding sign-ups to the parent council FaceBook page. This should allow people to now comment when we put out a plea for help or ask for ideas etc. Someone wishing to post a new post will still need moderator action.

Moderators are currently myself, Rob Brooker and Natasha Pawlukiewicz. I’ve also spent a lot of time reporting all the phishing and spam e-mails into the shared e-mail which will hopefully start to cut down the numbers of nonsense e-mails into there.

Explained where meeting minutes are on Aboyne Academy website and will flag on Facebook.

Attended a meeting with Laurence Findlay, Director of Education and Children’s Services within Aberdeenshire Council and some of the other parent chairs on the 9 October,

A somewhat sobering meeting in terms of the budget cuts heading our way in the next 5 years.

Aberdeenshire have the largest school estate of Scotland but it’s not an efficient one. Net Zero agenda also on the cards and to be adhered to.

He talked of poverty proofing the schools. Looking to remove some of the extras to protect the core. Need further clarification on what constitutes ‘core’ but agree that the parent forum may need to increase fundraising activities or support the decision to say no, where budget pressures make it so

Something I did want to raise this evening relating to this is the question should we be looking into turning our parent council into a charity. This would open several lines of grant applications to us and also allow us to benefit from gift aid donations however acknowledge there is work to do so.

I think it was Mearns Academy have recently gone through the process and I met one of the other Chairs who for a living does the paperwork for people. Useful people to know!

From other voluntary groups within Aboyne I've been involved with in the past I'm also aware of local individuals who've gone through the process and I'm sure would be happy to advise.

The annual audit becomes slightly more complicated, and we'd need to ensure it wasn't going to be problematic for those coming through in the future however I do think it's worthy of consideration given the scale of cuts coming to education.

**Action 1. Jenny took away an action to set up a meeting to explore pros and cons of pursuing charity status with parent council members and others who have already gone through the process.**

We made clear as a body of Chairs to Laurence Findlay that our minimum expectation would be to maintain the level of service but improvements also expected so something to feed to your local councillors.

As a further aside to the budgets is the need to increase our fundraising. An idea to run past everyone is I think it would be useful to have a fundraising group, as an aside but feeding into the parent council. Not everyone wants to join the parent council but are happy to contribute and keen to contribute to smaller sub-groups pertaining to their areas of interest and expertise. If you agree I can put a call out to the wider parent body and seek volunteers.

**Action 2. Jenny took away and action to put out a call for expressions of interest to the wider parent forum.**

I'm also in communication with the national parent forum about becoming one of the representatives for Aberdeenshire. I feel it more important now than ever to ensure that more rural schools like ours are being heard in the national forum and this group offers a direct line to the minister for education.

Someone from Banchory and I have expressed an interest in sharing the role and I believe a rep from Fraserburgh would also be interested, I'll keep you posted. Regardless of the outcome of these early discussions I will engage with this group and have already fed into the Chair of this group that something needs to change with the funding model for transport.

There are changes afoot in the Scottish educational system as well – looking to move to a Scottish Diploma of Achievement so a very brief run through of my interest in this group and adding another small voice for schools like Aboyne Academy.

Finally Mr Foy and I had a good catch up recently. Agreeing on some areas that require more immediate action and input from the wider parent forum and I am pleased to say I have also now had a tour of the school pond and I'll get it minuted that I've promised to help on a digging day with this one as well. Then I can't wriggle out if the weathers bad.

I'm keen to remove any potential barriers to accessing these meetings. This includes the request for people to sign up to attend. We discussed squeezing another meeting in pre-Christmas but in person as sometimes face to face is good. I think a balance can be achieved with these groups to suit the geographic spread of members but also to remind (in person) of the problems that aging buildings like the academy can have.

**Agreement was reached to trial open access and if sensitive issues are on the agenda – sign up would be re-introduced for such meetings.**

**Notes on the discussion:**

Becki Redmond commented on the need to future proof this, Becki discussed this at length (Charity status) while part of the primary school PTA and mentioned that once you are a charity you can't go back. Having a fundraising team and having a link with the PTA has worked very well and would support this. It would allow us to tap into

a wider group of parents.

Rob Brooker commented in relation the Charity Status that it would be good to know what is involved and would like to see a paper that outlines the steps and a discussion with the folks at Mearns Academy. The benefit would have to offset the work to do it (cost benefit ratio), whilst ensuring folks are committed to this. It would be good to gather the necessary information and then have a specific meeting about it. JB commented that Christine McClennan can put us in touch with people that have done it.

Natasha Pawlukiewicz wondered if there is support from the local authority as this could be an avenue for lots of PTA's, they could be supportive of this given other academies are doing this. It is understood that Alford Academy are considering this approach well.

**See Actions 1&2 Above.**

Rob Brooker (RB) commented sign up to meetings, occurred during the pandemic the background to this was meetings were not very secure, we should consider why the additional access measures were put in place.

Removing the extras to maintain the core is a real concern RB would like to know more about what this means and would it relate to vocational activities that are key to some kids who would potentially be disadvantaged. Michael Foy will pick this up in his Headmasters Report.

Michael Foy noted potential concern with having open access and people who are not entitled to attend accessing the meeting.

Rob Brooker outlined the requirements of the meeting in terms of access to those that have children at the school.

Jenny Blair commented she had received feedback that signing up feels like a barrier to get into the meeting and links are lost. Becki Redmond agreed it is a hurdle. Becki provided an example of attending at the Primary PTA, where an email link was sent. Jenny outlined lots of different options to try and reduce the barriers. Jenny Blair commented that other Chairs present at the October meeting with Laurence Findlay did not currently place sign up requirements for access to their meetings.

Rob Brooker commented the decision was made at the time and we could decide to remove this. If others are not experiencing any issues with unwanted attendees, we could approve it. Michael Foy requested that if there was a particularly thorny issue we could put in a link for additional security.

**See Agreement above.**

Jenny Blair commented Lawrence Findlay was not very specific on the details of the budget cuts and commented education does get the largest slice of the budget, he would not be pushed on the details. Talking about poverty proofing the schools. Head teachers have control over their budgets and therefore the Director does not have control. Annual spend reducing by 10% and retrofitting for a net zero environment, easy decisions have been made and as the population ages there will be a shift of some of the budget to adult care.

Sarah Brown offered to send a link out to provide comments, she also provided an overview of the budget and the demographics of the population in Aberdeenshire, significant public sector budgets, pay increases, inflation, and care budgets as the population ages.

**4. Headteacher's Report**

Thanks to Jenny, AAPC members and everyone who has come along this evening. Your support is much appreciated.

Teacher reps – Dougie Kinnear (Science), Bengt Evertsson (Languages), Claire Drewitt (Guidance)

I'd like to give you some general updates of what has been happening since we last met in September then focus on 2 areas for today – finance and facilities.

### S1 pupil update

English – positive about S1 progress. Oracy skills in particular are good, and this is also a big focus in CREW.

Maths – some confidence issues around basic arithmetic – number bonds. Working on this. Assessment to measure progress shortly.

Leadership development – CREW. HorseBack UK. Helping develop as a Crew. Also skills development from our SLP like compassion, inner strength, critical thinking.

### Aboyne Local Place Plan

All form classes were encouraged to participate in this. Assembly followed by display in library and form class tasks. 74 complete and 60 partially complete. Final figures should be higher than this.

### SQA Appeals

10% of appeals were successful. Range of subjects.

### Whole school walk

This took place and was a successful day, lots of positive feedback, got everyone outside, we were all a bit rusty as it was the first post pandemic, chose not to request sponsorship due to the cost of living crisis.

### Christmas Fair

Plan to have a year away from this as lots of other activity ongoing at the moment.

### Young Musician

Tomorrow evening. Tickets still available!

### RGU Access Courses

We joined the **Robert Gordon University (RGU)** hub earlier in the year and our S6 pupils have just completed the 'Access To' programme that they offer as part of this. This ran for 7 weeks in August/September once a week after school to give them the opportunity to find out, in a very hands-on way, what it might be like to study a particular subject at university. RGU provided all the transport to allow this to happen, and it is a significant investment in our young people. Our S5 pupils have now signed up and have been offered their places. Graduation ceremonies from those courses took place last week. Rona Lindsey (DHT) attended 2 of those.

### Staffing Update

Aiden Lindsey – secondment to Mackie as Aboyne is currently overstaffed, however he can be pulled back if required.

Chief Invigilator – vacancy the invigilation team are key to supporting the prelims for 2 weeks in January and the final exams in May and June – really important role as the integrity of the exam process is key. There will be an advert released.

### Pond project

Underway

### Classroom furniture

Awaiting delivery

### Aboyne campus

Developments to develop campus working. Meeting held today with Barbra Milne to strengthen the working relationship – would like to continue to develop things but initial meeting (maintenance and security – range of topics etc).

### Parents evenings

We had S3-6 parents evenings face to face last term. Good to get parents back into the building. Online for S2 later in November.

**Action 3. Michael Foy is going to look into the potential numbers difference between online and in person to see if there is any noticeable difference.**

### Getting the message out

Starting to put more work into this. More regular newsletters, council good news, the Fountain etc.

Catherine Cormack (Business Community support officer) assisting with this.

Two focus topics for this evening – finance and facilities. I'm very aware that there is a bit of a contradiction here because I am going to start by telling you a bit about why we are under a lot of financial pressure as a council. Then I'm going to follow that up with where I think we need some investment! However, I think the two can sit comfortably side by side because part of what we must try to do as a Council is invest in the sites that we are committed to for the long term and the Aboyne Campus is definitely one of them.

### Finance

You'll all be aware of the financial situation that local authorities find themselves in at present due to a whole variety of pressures.

In addition to all the funding, inflationary and pay increase pressures, in Aberdeenshire we are facing a near future with some interesting changes in demographics. By 2030 The number of school age children is set to fall. The number of people in Aberdeenshire who are pensionable age is set to increase dramatically.

- 1) Our school roll which potentially fall by 100 over the next 6-8 years. This will mean a reduction in funding and staffing. The net effect of that is that it's harder to provide a broad curriculum but it releases pressure on the building. Good news is that we know this and are planning and looking at solutions.
- 2) As a Council we will have to provide health and social care for a much larger group of people. This will place an additional pressure on the system.

Within ECS we have regular discussions with the Director about budgets and the future. I have been in numerous face to face discussions and workshops about this since the Summer. What I would emphasise though is that it is forcing us to ask big questions around how we can maintain financial viability going forwards. Some things about the way we do school may have to change in the future?

So where are we today?

- The money distributed to faculties is very small on an annual basis.
- There is very little to spend on bigger projects.
- Our transport costs are significant. Transporting pupils to college, to Foundation Apprenticeship placements. Currently funded.

- Supporting curricular school trips. The funding provided does not cover the breadth of what we need to do.
- We do a lot of funding applications – lottery awards for all, Aberdeenshire Educational Trust, Participatory budgeting money from Aberdeenshire.

### Facilities

Changing rooms – environment out of step with our culture and leading to lots of anxiety and non-participation.

Toilets – Closed door design leading to costly and time-consuming issues.

PE facilities – need to develop an additional facility to support the number of classes.

Discussion followed.

### Upcoming events

#### Aboyne Academy: 50 years old

Planning for 2025! Volunteers please!

## **5. Treasurer's Report**

Rob Brooker provided the following figures £445.75 in the bank waiting from the annual payment from the council subject to us being a PTA, work is underway to update the signatories on the TSB account.

## **6. AOCB**

Rob Brooker commented the Christmas Fare and the Raffle on the 19<sup>th</sup> Dec – would it be possible to have PTA volunteers to run this.

### **Action 4. Jenny Blair to put out a request for volunteers.**

Becki Redmond commented on the volume of litter around the school campus and lady wood, opportunity to improve and BR would be more than willing to support. Would like to bring young people on board. Michael Foy agreed and commented the eco group are looking at establish recycling in the canteen (which is where the rubbish is generated from). Janitors used to spend a lot of time dealing with this however it is not that efficient as the issue needs to be tackled at source.

Vapers – people are moving around, and this is an ongoing issue.

Rotary and DoE people are volunteering to collect litter however it needs to be tackled at source.

## **7. Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed to hold a meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023.