

## **PE1694/I**

The Highland Council submission of 22 October 2018

<b>Date:</b>	October 2018
<b>Report Title:</b>	Response to the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee - Scottish Parliament Public Petition PE1694: FREE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC SERVICES.
<b>Report By:</b>	Chief Executive

### **1. Executive Summary**

1.1 This report has been written in response to Scottish Parliament Public Petition PE1694: FREE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC SERVICES. "Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to change the law to ensure that musical instrument tuition is available as of right to all children attending state schools in Scotland who wish it, free of charge."

1.2 The Improvement Service's most recent survey of Instrumental Music Services (IMS) in Scotland (2017) shows that pupil numbers accessing the service across Scotland held steady over the past five years with 9.1% of the Scottish school roll participating. The concern which has led to this petition seems to be that price increases and service cuts between financial years 2017/18 and 2018/19 has led to a reduction in the availability and uptake of IMS in some parts of Scotland.

### **2. Highland Council Context**

2.1 The Highland Council meets its statutory obligation to provide music as part of the school curriculum, including pupils being able to study music at SQA National 4/5, Higher and Advanced Higher levels.

2.2 It also provides an Instrumental Music Tuition Service (abbreviated nationally to IMS) which is discretionary, and is in addition to curricular music. For some parents

this service is charged for, but it is provided free of charge to parents of pupils who are:

- on income support benefits; or
- in S4 to S6 and use an instrument taught by an IMS Instructor for an SQA National Award.

2.3 The gross cost of providing IMS in Highland is approximately £2M p.a. This is offset by fees from participants bringing the net cost of the service to £1.2M.

### **3. Highland IMS Delivery**

3.1 IMS in Highland is performing well in Scottish terms with 10% of the school roll taking

up music lessons. The Highland Council values its IMS and wants to see it grow and develop. It was, therefore, reviewed by the Council's Redesign Board in December 2017 which concluded that the best way of protecting and developing the service was to transfer it to the Council's charitable arm's length organisation, High Life Highland (HLH), which it did in April 2018. The purpose of this move was to group the service with the Council's other cultural services already delivered by HLH, to enable greater focus and flexibility of approach.

3.2 Since it was transferred to HLH (between March and September 2018) pupil numbers in IMS have grown by 14% and are still growing, charges have been frozen and the service continues to be provided free to parents of pupils on income support benefits and those sitting an SQA exam in music. Shortly after the transfer, HLH added another five posts to the staff compliment which transferred from the Council, four of them permanent posts - in voice, pipe band drumming, guitar and drum kit, and one temporarily funded project post working across five primary schools to support their work on closing the poverty related attainment gap.

3.3 In addition to the IMS provision in Highland, HLH also delivers, on behalf of the Council, the Scottish Government/Creative Scotland funded Youth Music Initiative and runs an infrastructure of area and regional music groups and ensembles (which is possible because of the staff structure which exists for IMS). The area and regional groups are largely self-funding from participant income and sponsorship. Between them these programmes provide an opportunity for all children in Highland to be introduced to music and provide a pathway for people who want to experience

playing at a higher level. There is also a vibrant voluntary sector in traditional and other forms of music in Highland.

#### **4. Responses to the Questions Posed by the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee**

4.1 There were three questions asked of Local Authority Chief Executives by the Public Petitions Committee: 1. The drop-out rate of children having instrumental music tuition in the past two years. 2. The projected drop-out rate for this year if charges for instrumental music tuition; continue to increase as they have done in recent years; and 3. Is there a particular reason that instrumental music tuition is not being regarded by education departments as a core subject?

4.2 **Drop-out rate** - between 2016/17 and 2018/19 the number of IMS pupils in Highland increased by 14%. This followed a reduction between 2015/16 and 2016/17 where pupil numbers in IMS reduced by 10%, however, this was the first reduction recorded during the five years of the Improvement Service survey. Parents of children in Highland who had discontinued IMS lessons were surveyed in 2017 as part of the work to review the service and only 15% said that price was a factor.

4.3 **Projected drop-out rate 2018/19** - it is anticipated that the number of pupils taking up the service will continue to grow because:

- an additional four permanent IMS posts have been added to the team from August 2018;
- the marketing of IMS has been improved, including printed materials for use in schools and the development of a web presence and social media so that more people know about the opportunities which are available;
- an on-line bookings system has been developed which makes it easier for pupils to access the service;
- HLH intends to continue the freeze in charges into 2019/20 if possible;
- HLH is working to seek opportunities to develop the service and reduce reliance on public funding by increasing the number of pupils who take up the IMS service, this will include existing staff increasing the number of pupils that they teach and by further adding to the staff compliment; and
- Seeking opportunities for adding new services, for after school, evening and weekend music tuition which are open to the public

**4.4 Instrumental services not regarded as a core education service?** - in Highland HLH carries out a range of services delivering or support education services such as the management of the Active Schools programme, English as a second language tuition, youth work services and IMS. There are a number of components to the Council's music provision which are all important because they form a development pathway from introduction to excellence in music for Highland young people. These include:

- the Scottish Government/Creative Scotland funded Youth Music Initiative which introduce all school pupils to music (which is managed and delivered through the Highland IMS);
- music which is taught as part of the school curriculum;
- the music tuition service (IMS);
- area and regional groups and ensembles (which is managed and delivered through the Highland IMS).

While IMS is a non-statutory part of the provision, it is seen as being a core part of the overall music provision in Highland.

## **5. Charges**

5.1 In balancing its priorities, the Council has not previously sought to offer IMS tuition free of charge to all pupils. Whilst its top priority is to maintain free access for those in receipt of Income Support benefits and those undertaking SQA studies, the Council also recognises that IMS is a service which can generate fees from those who can pay, reducing the need to balance the budget by cutting services.

5.2 IMS in Highland is performing well and it would be difficult to make a case for increasing the cost of delivering the service to the public purse by making it free when it is currently growing based partly on income from participants.

5.3 The Council, in transferring its IMS to HLH has created a situation where earned income can be used to protect and potentially grow the service beyond the 14% growth achieved in the first six months since the transfer. Public sector funding by its nature is limited and unless that position changes, making the service free and therefore fully reliant on public funding will place a limit on service growth and development.

5.4 It is important that the IMS is available to pupils who cannot afford the service. As stated, in Highland it is already provided free of charge to children of families in receipt of benefits. If there were to be additional public sector resources this would be the best focus.

5.5 There is capacity to increase the number of people who benefit from IMS in Highland. Experience has been that some services which are completely reliant on public sector funding have had to contract and it is considered that a mix of public sector and income from participants is the best way forward, and that providers should be able to continue

to set reasonable charges at a local level.

5.6 It is understood that all local authorities have voluntarily provided fees exemptions to IMS pupils who are studying for an SQA exam. This means that in addition to music pupils receiving curricular music, they receive additional free IMS lessons and this exemption is applied irrespective of whether their families are in receipt of income related benefits. There is no similar arrangement in place for other curricular subjects where there is no mechanism for the provision of individual or small group tuition. In order to further protect the financial sustainability of the service consideration, could be given to removing that exemption while continuing to provide free services to pupils of families on income benefits.

## **6. Conclusion**

6.1 While funding to provide free IMS to everyone is something which would be desirable, it is not considered to be realistic and if this funding were to be introduced and be limited it could prevent local authorities from developing creative solutions to the problems being reported in some areas, resulting in the service remaining static.

6.2 It is important that the service is provided free of charge to pupils belonging to families on low income and additional funding from the Scottish Government for that would be welcomed.

6.3 The financial sustainability of IMS could be supported by moving away from the current voluntary arrangement to exempt pupils undertaking SQA exams in music from fees on the basis that: the Council is already providing a music education though the formal curriculum; it is not available in other subjects; and the important focus for fees exemptions should be on those who cannot afford to pay.

6.4 The summary responses to the questions asked by the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee are as follows:

1. The charge for IMS in Highland has been frozen this year and pupil numbers have increased by 14%.
2. At this stage it is expected that it will be possible to continue to freeze the charge in 2019/20 and that pupil numbers will continue to grow.
3. IMS is considered to be a core part of music provision in Highland.