

**WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL****Report by Laura Mason, Chief Education Officer****Educational Services Committee: 18 September 2024**

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**Subject: Strategy for Excellence and Equity****1. Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on progress with delivering improved outcomes for attainment and equity.
- 1.2 This report is for noting.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Educational Services Committee is asked to note:  
;
- (a) the Excellence and Equity Improvement Plan 2023-2026;
  - (b) the Stretch Aims Improvement Plan 2024-2025; and
  - (c) the Strategic Equity Fund tapered reduction 2022 – 2026.

**3. Background**

- 3.1 The Strategy for Excellence and Equity published in 2023 outlines West Dunbartonshire's context in relation to tackling the poverty-related attainment gap and sets out a plan to embed principles and practice for equity and excellence (2023-2026).
- 3.2 The Education Service Excellence and Equity Board chaired by the Chief Education Officer oversees the strategy's implementation and governs resource allocation. The Board meets twice each term with membership including officers, headteachers and the Attainment Advisor.
- 3.3 The Strategy for Excellence and Equity is supported by Scottish Government Strategic Equity Funding (2022-2026). This funding gradually decreases each year during this period. The fund available for academic session 2024/25 is £1,149,765; and for the final year of the programme, session 2025/26, is £851,743. The Service is on track to achieve full budget spend in session 2024/25.
- 3.4 Included in this report is the service Excellence and Equity Improvement Plan 2023 -2026 (Appendix 1) which sets out service priorities and plan in advance of exit from the Strategic Equity Fund in 2026. The service is in year two of this plan.
- 3.5 Since 2017/18, West Dunbartonshire schools have received funding from the Scottish Government's Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). PEF is directly allocated to schools with the specific goal of addressing the poverty-related attainment gap. Full funding will continue until 2026.

- 3.5.1 Schools have submitted improvement plans for equity and excellence which include plans for Pupil Equity Funding.
- 3.5.2 Schools are on track to achieve full PEF budget spend in session 2024/25. This projection is based on costed plans submitted by schools in June 2024; and committed spend up to June 2024.
- 3.6 Strategic Equity Funding has supported providing resources to deliver a service wide improvement programme for excellence and equity.
- 3.7 A recent update to the Scottish Attainment Challenge Framework (March 2023) required local authorities to set stretch aims up to 2025/26 and include an outline trajectory of progress from 2023 to 2026. West Dunbartonshire's Stretch Aims whilst set by the local authority are scrutinised by the national agencies. These Stretch Aims were shared with Committee in December 2023. An update on progress and improvement plan for session 2024/2025 to achieve Stretch Aims is included at Appendix 2.
- 3.8 The Service has performed well against key excellence and equity national benchmarks and quality indicators as evidenced in school inspection reports and authority performance to narrow the attainment gap in the Broad General Education.
- 3.9 The service implements an Improvement Framework to support and challenge school / early learning and childcare improvement against national benchmarks and quality indicators.
- 3.10 His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education has announced a national thematic review on local authority approaches to school improvement. The reviews will focus on local authority priorities for improving school performance, what is working well and the challenges. The reviews will commence early in this academic year.

#### **4.0 Main Issues**

- 4.1 Whilst strong progress has been made with outcomes and targets for excellence and equity the challenges of our poverty related attainment gap persist.
- 4.2 The Strategic Equity Fund supports a wide range of interventions and strategic developments for excellence and equity. The Fund has provided additionality in the areas of psychological services, pupil and family support, family welfare, youth work, literacy, numeracy, wellbeing, school improvement, professional learning, early intervention, early level play and learning. Local authority planning in response to the annual reductions in resource is scheduled up to 2026.
- 4.3 The Strategy for Excellence and Equity has been designed to embed the existing principles and practices while establishing a sustainable model beyond the availability of funding. To achieve this, we have identified a focused set of priorities

#### 4.3.1 Priorities 2024 – 2026:

##### 1. Embed Learning Principles and Practices for Equity:

- In all strategic developments integrate principles that emphasise both equity and excellence.
- Provide professional learning opportunities for staff focused on meeting the diverse needs of all learners through high quality learning, teaching, and assessment.
- Adapt the curriculum in the Broad General Education and Senior Phase to deliver personalised learning to meet the diverse needs of all children and young people.
- Build on our strong partnership working with stakeholders and third sector to make sure strong system level commitment to excellence and equity.

##### 2. Embed Outcome-Focused Improvement Practices:

- Conduct close and regular monitoring of performance data with a focus on equity outcomes. This allows us to track progress and make informed decisions about resourcing and targeted intervention.
- Build on our strong collaborative work across schools and local learning communities to drive continuous improvement.
- Prioritise regular engagement by senior leaders to provide support and challenge for improvement.

#### 4.3.2 Several new strategies and policies have been developed to provide clear expectations and guidance for future which include :

- **Data Use Policy:** Enhance excellence and equity by effectively utilizing data for school improvement and staff data literacy.
- **Languages Strategy:** Promote excellence in language education, preparing students for a global workforce while fostering cultural diversity.
- **Learning for Sustainability Strategy:** Cultivate environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and global citizenship through community, culture, collaboration, and curriculum.

#### 4.3.3 During term one (Session 2024/25) refreshed strategies for literacy, curriculum and health and wellbeing will be produced incorporating the service strategic priorities for excellence and equity.

#### 4.4 Pupil Equity Fund

Scottish Government has committed to PEF funding until 2026, uncertainty remains regarding future funding commitments.

#### 4.4.1 Additional central staffing will be allocated this session to conduct focussed work with all schools on resource commitments funded through PEF to ensure readiness for exit from PEF in 2026.

**4.4.2** Officers and headteachers regularly monitor PEF interventions and assess the impact of the additional resource commitment on the attainment and achievement outcomes of our most deprived children and young people.

**4.5** Improvement Framework

To monitor progress a Service Improvement Framework has been developed. The Framework monitors and supports quality performance in schools and early learning centres.

**4.5.1** Senior officers engage in scrutiny visits to all establishments delivering a core, enhanced and supported level of scrutiny and support. Three headteachers have been seconded part time to implement aspects of the Framework in collaboration with the senior officers.

**4.5.2** To inform our future school improvement strategies, an evaluation of the WDC Improvement Framework was conducted in June 2024. The evaluation aimed to gather feedback from headteachers on the framework's effectiveness in supporting continuous improvement within schools. Results indicate that headteachers value the framework's collaborative approach, particularly the opportunities for networking and shared learning. Scrutiny visits, support from Education Officers, and participation in monitoring and capacity building visits to other schools were evaluated as beneficial. The evaluation also highlighted the positive impact of protected time for focused work and the reflective nature of the framework in driving school improvement efforts

**5. People Implications**

**5.1** As reported to Council in June 2022 the Scottish Attainment Challenge funding enabled the provision of additional temporary (seconded) funded posts within the education service, partner council services and external providers. The annual (tapered) decrease in funding by 2026 will reduce the number of staff available to deliver in these areas with the seconded staff returning to their substantive posts, and any backfill element will cease.

**5.2** The tapered decrease in funding by 2026 will reduce the number of Strategic Equity Funded posts:

- 2021/22 - 41.5 funded posts
- 2022/23 – 39.0 funded posts
- 2023/24 – 35.0 funded posts
- 2024/25 – 28.0 funded posts
- 2025/26 – 24.07 funded posts
- 2026/27 – 0.0 funded posts

**6. Financial and Procurement Implications**

**6.1** Funding from Scottish Government supports the work of the Strategy for Excellence and Equity. The Education Committee will be aware that a tapered reduction of Strategic Equity Funding was announced in 2022 reducing the annual income to West Dunbartonshire; and reducing the capacity of the service to deliver strategic priorities for excellence and equity.

- 6.2** Since its inception in 2015/16 to March 2024 the Council received £15,834,008 in funding. Please note that in financial year 2024/25 the funding available to West Dunbartonshire will have reduced by almost 50% compared to 2021/22. Table 6 provides the detail of the annual reduction in funding up to 2026:

Table 6:

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
£2,043,815	£1,745,797	£1,447,779	£1,149,761	£851,743
Reduction of £298,018 (-15%)	Reduction of £298,018 (-17%)	Reduction of £298,018 (-21%)	Reduction of £298,018 (-26%)	

## 7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** Current budget constraints and the reduced funding model could impact negatively on sustained improvement in future academic sessions. However, we will continue to monitor this closely to inform future planning.

## 8. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 8.1** A full Equality Impact Assessment was submitted to Committee in March 2022 and identified that the decrease in funding will reduce capacity. Scope exists to mitigate impact with the development of the Strategy for Excellence and Equity 2023-2027.

## 9. Consultation

- a. Legal Services and the Section 95 Officer have been consulted in relation to the content of this report.

## 10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** This reports reflects the Council's overarching priority to support our communities to thrive.

Laura Mason  
Chief Education Officer  
September 2024

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**Appendix:** (1) Excellence and Equity Improvement Plan (2023-2026)  
(2) Stretch Aims Improvement Plan 2024/2025

**Background Papers:** Equality Impact Assessment – March 2022

**Wards Affected:** All wards