

Investigation findings

Introduction

On 6 March 2022 posts appeared on social media regarding Gaelic books having been dumped in a skip at Glencruitten Hostel. A concerned individual contacted the Council to raise their concerns on 7 March. Local press and national press began making enquiries with the Council on 7 March and both ran articles in the press.

As a result, the Executive Director with Responsibility for Education required that the matter be looked at to assess the facts and circumstances in relation to the matter and what lessons might be learned.

Background

Informal arrangements were put in place for the Oban Education Office (OEO) and two containers

There were 6 boxes of documents including Education Scotland distributions, management circulars and research information from many years ago. The team went through the boxes and any information they identified as confidential was put into confidential waste sacks for disposal through that route. Other office items were either put into boxes for removing to Willowview or put in the skip if deemed unnecessary.

Clearance of the main office took all morning up until 1pm and in the afternoon the team cleared the reception area and the back room which was still full of equipment and some Gaelic books which were very old. The team followed the same process for disposal of any confidential information.

Staff went to Rockfield PS to drop off some resources there and look for storage space for some other resources.

Container - Staff were tasked with clearing the container of the Gaelic resources.

There was a significant amount of resources and they went through them to identify those that would still be used by schools and those that would not, eg, older versions of curriculum resources were put into the skip, although some of these were still in good condition. Due to the large amount of resource they also thinned down some of those resources and put them in the skip.

Resources that could still be used were identified and some taken to Dunoon for distribution, others were taken to Oban High, Fuaran and others for distribution to schools in Oban, Lorne and the Isles and Islay. There were still resources in the container at this time.

There was discussion on social media about a number of Gaelic dictionaries found in the skip and there were approximately 8 or 9 boxes, each containing 50/60 dictionaries. On the basis that the schools now use an online resource, a view was taken by the team that some would be kept and the remainder were put into the skip.

Another officer attended at the container on 4 March to further thin down the amount of resources still there.

Issues raised by Members of the public

Two main issues have been identified

1. Gaelic Resources in skip

On 6 March posts started appearing on social media regarding Gaelic books having been dumped in a skip at Glencruitten Hostel and a concerned individual contacted the Council to raise her concerns on 7 March. Local press and national press began making enquiries with the Council on 7 March and both ran articles in the papers. The reputational damage to the Council locally is high and the Oban Times ran a further story in their edition on 17 March.

The container had been bought by Education a number of years ago to store excess Gaelic resources produced by Storrann. Historically, Storrann would do a minimum print run and always provided the Council with more resources than might actually be required by the schools in Argyll and Bute.

Schools continued to replenish their stocks from the container when necessary. There was an ad hoc procedure in place for this. No inventory of the resources was maintained.

There was a significant amount of resource within the container that had built up over a number of years as the Council has moved to using on-line Gaelic dictionaries, so no longer requires paper

versions

Lessons identified

Before the clearance of the OEO and the container began, more consideration should have been given to what was to happen with the resources in both in terms of reuse, re-distribution or continued storage either in the container or elsewhere and staff in attendance should have been aware of the decisions around this prior to undertaking the clearance.

There was no evidence that the disposal of materials was in any way an indication of any lack of respect on the part of staff for Gaelic or Gaelic culture, in fact the staff made clear that they felt quite the opposite and held the Gaelic language and culture in high regard.

Decisions appeared to be made ad hoc on the day around this, eg, staff taking resources away in their own vehicles for reuse, re-distribution and alternative storage.

The Education service has guidance with sections on resources and office files when dealing with school moves and it would have been good if that guidance had been followed.

RESOURCES	
Inventory made of internal resources available for other local schools	School
Inventory circulated to schools and items picked up/delivered	School
Skip arranged for dumping of any old resources/items no longer of use	School & School Support

OFFICE FILES	
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Any paperwork required to be retained under GDPR - scanned and stored centrally prior to being shredded or placed in confidential waste sacks