Minute

Education, Communities and Housing Committee

Wednesday, 4 February 2026, 09:30.

Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Place, Kirkwall.

Present

Councillors Gwenda M Shearer, Ivan A Taylor, Graham A Bevan, Stephen G Clackson, Alexander G Cowie, Steven B Heddle, James R Moar, John A R Scott and Heather N Woodbridge.

Teacher Representatives:

Jo Hill and Mary Maley.

Present via remote link (Microsoft Teams)

Councillors David Dawson, Janette A Park and Jean E Stevenson.

Religious Representative:

Reverend Susan Kirkbride**.**

Clerk

- Sandra Craigie, Committees Officer.

In Attendance

- James Wylie, Director of Education, Communities and Housing.
- Wendy Bowen, Head of Education.
- Frances Troup, Head of Strategic Housing, Housing Operations and Homelessness.
- Lesley Mulraine, Service Manager (Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation).
- Pat Robinson, Service Manager (Accounting).
- Imogen Kerr, Educational Psychologist (for Items 1 and 2).
- Georgette Herd, Principal Solicitor.

In Attendance via remote link (Microsoft Teams)

- Seonaidh McDonald, Principal, UHI Orkney (for Item 1).

Observing

- Garry Burton, Head of Active Communities.
- Alex Rodwell, Head of Performance and Business Support.
- Andrew Hamilton, Service Manager (Resources).
- Morag Miller, Service Manager (Primary Education).
- Kerry Spence, Service Manager (Community Learning, Development and Employability).
- Siobhan Wilks, Service Manager (Support for Learning and Inclusion).
- Nigel Fyffe, Team Manager (Maintenance and Heritage).
- Ashley Gillespie, Senior HR Advisor.

Apology

- Reverend Fraser Macnaughton, Religious Representative.

Declarations of Interest

- No declarations of interest were intimated.

Chair

- Councillor Gwenda M Shearer.

1. Personal Mobile Digital Devices: Policy for Educational Establishments

After consideration of a report by the Director of Education, Communities and Housing, together with an Equality Impact Assessment and an Island Communities Impact Assessment, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing reports from the Head of Education and the Educational Psychologist, the Committee:

Resolved to **recommend to the Council** that the Personal Mobile Digital Devices: Policy for Educational Establishments, attached as Appendix 1 to this Minute, be approved.

Jo Hill and Mary Maley left the meeting at this point.

2. Care Inspectorate – Sheltered Housing Service

After consideration of a report by the Director of Education, Communities and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation), the Committee:

Noted the inspection of the Housing Support Service within the Sheltered Housing Service, undertaken by the Care Inspectorate, and the subsequent report and Service Action Plan, attached as Appendices 1 and 2 to the report by the Director of Education, Communities and Housing.

Councillor James R Moar left the meeting during discussion of this item.

3. Housing Services – Performance Monitoring

After consideration of a report by the Director of Education, Communities and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation), the Committee:

Noted the Housing Service's benchmarked performance in relation to other councils and Housing Associations within its peer group, attached as Appendix 1 to the report by the Director of Education, Communities and Housing.

Reverend Susan Kirkbride left the meeting during discussion of this item.

4. Housing Revenue Account – Repairs and Maintenance Programmes

Revenue Expenditure Monitoring

After consideration of a report by the Head of Finance, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Accounting), the Committee:

Noted:

4.1. The summary position of expenditure incurred as at 31 December 2025, against the approved Housing Revenue Account revenue repairs and maintenance programme for 2025/26, as detailed in section 1.4 of the report by the Head of Finance.

4.2. The detailed analysis of expenditure figures and approved programme updates in respect of the approved Housing Revenue Account revenue repairs and maintenance programme for 2025/26, attached as Appendix 1 to the report by the Head of Finance.

5. Revenue Expenditure Monitoring

After consideration of a report by the Head of Finance, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Accounting), the Committee:

Noted:

5.1. The revenue expenditure monitoring statement in respect of service areas for which the Education, Communities and Housing Committee was responsible, for the period 1 April to 31 December 2025, attached as Annex 1 to the report by the Head of Finance, indicating a net budget overspend position of £1,508,300, comprising the following:

- Overspend of £688,700 against General Fund services.
- Overspend of £819,600 against Non-General Fund services.

5.2. The revenue financial service area statement in respect of service areas for which the Education, Communities and Housing Committee was responsible, for the period 1 April to 31 December 2025, attached as Annex 2 to the report by the Head of Finance.

5.3. The explanations given and actions proposed in respect of significant budget variances, as outlined in the Budget Action Plan, attached as Annex 3 to the report by the Head of Finance.

6. Conclusion of Meeting

At 10:43 the Chair declared the meeting concluded.

Signed: Gwenda M Shearer.

ORKNEY
ISLANDS COUNCIL

Education, Communities and Housing

Personal Mobile Digital Devices: Policy for Educational Establishments

Version Control

Document Reference.	**Revision.**	**Issue Date.**	**Reason for Issue.**	**Reviewer.**	**Sign.**
ELH036	00.	Date	New Policy.	Service Manager (Support for Learning and Inclusion)	

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1. Useful Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

Personal Devices

A ‘personal device’ refers to any mobile digital electronic equipment belonging to an individual which is capable of connecting to the internet without using Wi-Fi. This includes, but is not limited to:

- **Mobile phones:** any handheld device that provides voice communication, text messaging, internet access, and multimedia functions.
- **Wearable Technology:** Devices such as smartwatches and fitness trackers that can connect to the internet and other devices to provide notifications, health tracking, and other functions.
- **Smart Accessories**: Items such as smart glasses, smart rings, and other technologies that can connect to the internet and perform various digital functions.
- **Any other/future devices** that fit the criteria of being able to connect to the internet without using Wi-Fi.

Managed Devices

A ‘managed device’ as referred to in this document is any item of digital electronic equipment that is provided by Orkney Islands Council. Orkney Islands Council has the ability to ensure these devices are set up with appropriate protections; that their use is monitored; and that any necessary modifications are made.

Schools

A ‘school’ as referred to in this document is a local authority education setting, managed on behalf of the local authority by a Head Teacher (or a person temporarily designated to take the role of ‘Acting Head Teacher’).

2. Introduction

This Local Authority Policy has been created in line with National Guidance, current legislation, research, and best practice. It is also informed by extensive consultation with school communities across Orkney, undertaken during the summer and autumn of 2025.

Schools occupy a key space, and play a crucial role, in shaping the experiences of our children and young people as they develop and grow. Of course, schools exist within the wider social context. But schools are also in a position to influence the society we become, by creating a positive and safe environment where children and young people can learn and flourish together – academically, socially, and emotionally – under the guidance of skilled adult mediators (teachers and support staff).

In a world where human activity is increasingly carried out online, getting the balance right between digital and face-to-face experiences is an ongoing challenge for us all.

On the one hand, digital technology allows almost infinite access to information and resources, creating a vast wealth of learning opportunities. The practical applications are seemingly limitless and, enhanced by artificial intelligence, digital technology is rapidly transforming the way we conduct our day-to-day lives. Communication is increasingly facilitated via social media, and being constantly connected with friends and family is currently an expectation for many people. Personal mobile digital devices ('personal devices') are powerful tools to access all these benefits.

However, although engaging in computer-based educational activities is often assumed to enhance learning, this is not always an accurate assumption. A 2015 report comparing educational outcomes in 64 OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries (OECD 2015: 153) revealed that countries where pupils spent the most time on computer-based learning returned lower rates of academic improvement than countries where only modest amounts of time were spent on these activities. As schools tackle generative artificial intelligence (AI), there is an added risk that students will increasingly disengage from the activities required to develop the higher-order thinking skills required for analysis and expression of original ideas.

And of course, online access itself does not come without its challenges. The online environment, unless very carefully managed, exposes children and young people to significant risks and potential harms. Personal devices offer unregulated access to the online environment, and their size makes it very difficult for adults to supervise the activity that is being conducted on them. National and international research points to negative impact of the presence of personal devices in school in the following broad areas:

- Safety (ranging from emotional harm to involvement in unsafe activities) (e.g. de Souza 2025).
- Attention, memory, and academic performance (Nesi 2024).
- Social skills (focus and face-to-face engagement), and social confidence (Nesi 2024).

Other areas under scrutiny include the relationship between personal devices and:

- bullying in school (e.g. Krumsvik 2024; Abrahamsson 2024).
- the marked decline in children's/young people's mental health since the early 2010's (e.g. Krumsvik 2024; Haidt 2024).

Parents face a significant dilemma with digital technology. During the two COVID-19 lockdowns in Scotland (March to August 2020; and January-February/March 2021), schools were closed, and remote learning became the norm. The long-term impact of this forced shift to online learning during the pandemic is still being studied, but it certainly had the effect of increasing the universal prominence of digital technology and online learning for pupils and teachers across Scotland.

Whilst many parents are deeply concerned for their children's safety and wellbeing, they also need to ensure their children can participate in the full range of activities enabling them to grow and develop. Getting the balance right is a complex business for parents, and the pressure to provide a smartphone can be hard to resist. In addition, the impact of personal devices varies from one person to the next. For example, there is evidence that 'phone use in school has a detrimental effect on the lowest-achieving pupils but not necessarily on higher-achieving children' (Beland and Murphy cited in de Souza 2025: 11). Socio-economic factors are also significant, with research showing that children and young people from less privileged backgrounds are exposed to greater risks of harm from online activity compared to their more privileged peers (e.g. de Souza 2022, Abrahamsson 2024, Nesi 2024). A significant minority of parents in England and internationally are concerned enough to resort to grassroots action such as the 'Smartphone Free Childhood' campaign, where parents 'sign a pact to refrain from giving their children smartphones', at least until the end of S3 (de Souza 2025). It is important that parents are central to policy-making in this area.

Secondary School teachers across Scotland are expressing concern about the negative effects that personal devices are having on learning, and the school environment more generally. In a recent survey, 88% of Secondary teachers say their lessons are regularly interrupted by unauthorised use of devices. Specific behaviours causing concern include:

- texting during lessons (reported by 90% of teachers).
- taking unauthorised photos (reported by 80% of teachers).
- online bullying (reported by 60% of teachers).

(Scottish Secondary Teachers Association 2024)

Across the world, governments, education authorities, and schools are encountering the same dilemmas. By 2022, according to UNESCO, 'almost one in four countries had introduced bans on mobile phones in schools in laws or policies' (House of Lords 2024). Scotland is not one of those countries. In the Scottish Government Guidance issued in August 2024, it was stated that a national ban was not 'appropriate or feasible'. Instead, schools and education authorities were advised to 'introduce restrictions and limitations' at their discretion. In Spring 2025, Principal Educational Psychologists were sent a brief survey to investigate how many of Scotland's 32 Councils had already created a policy at Local Authority level. 17 responses were received. Of these 17 responses, 6 Local Authorities already had created a policy. A further 3 Local Authorities had a policy 'in development' at that time.

Young people turning 22 this year were born in 2004, the year that Facebook was founded. Their generation has never known a world without social media, smartphones, on-demand entertainment, and 24-hour internet connection. An ongoing focus on children's and young people's voices is crucial if we are to build a positive digital future for – and with - our children. They need to be confident that their experiences and opinions are heard and respected within the discussion about online activity and personal devices (de Souza 2022). A large-scale qualitative analysis of the South Australian 'off and away' phone ban, implemented in 2024, captured the perspectives and recommendations of 12 to 18 year olds attending 5 Secondary Schools in the region (Bar *et al*. 2025). Their recommendations are important for all policy-makers:

(1) Make any change a gradual 'phased' change.

(2) Communicate with pupils, hear their voice, engage them in the process of implementing changes, seek to identify problems, and let them know that any restrictions are not a belittling of them and their views.

(3) Be ready for ongoing and explicit learning about phone use and social media, and pre-empt how to otherwise support pupils who have been reliant on their phones for emotional regulation.

(4) Create opportunities for pupils to actively demonstrate responsible phone use.

(5) Incorporate provisions for discrete phone communication with parents, especially in times of need.

3. Scope of this Policy - within its Local, National and International Context

School policies on personal devices must be rooted within the existing policy landscape on all levels - international, national, and local.

<u>International</u>

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was created following the Second World War and adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948. The UNCRC, developed in 1989, recognises that children and young people often need special care and protection that adults do not. It sets out the human rights of children and young people under the age of 18, including the right to an education; the right to freedom from violence, abuse and neglect; the right to be listened to and taken seriously; the right to a proper house, food, and clothing; and the right to relax and play. The UNCRC was adopted into Scottish Law in the form of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 on 16 January 2024.

<u>National</u>

Scottish Government: Guidance on Mobile Phones in Scotland's Schools (August 2024)
Rather than developing a national policy on personal mobile digital devices in schools, the Scottish Government has indicated it wishes Head Teachers to take the lead in this

area, drawing up policy at the individual school level. The Guidance on Mobile Phones in Scotland's Schools, published in August 2024, provides guidance to schools and local authorities, emphasising that schools and education authorities may introduce restrictions and limitations on the use of mobile phones through a policy approach, 'up to and including a full ban on the school estate during the school day'.

Getting it Right for Every Child
Getting it Right for Every Child (sometimes known as 'GIRFEC') is Scotland's long-standing, national commitment to provide all children, young people and their families with the right support at the right time, so that every child and young person can reach their full potential. GIRFEC is both an approach and framework used by services across Scotland to improve and uphold the wellbeing of every child in Scotland and their family, and to recognise and address any additional support needs promptly and sensitively.

Curriculum for Excellence
'Curriculum for Excellence' (often shortened to 'CfE') is the framework governing the education of learners throughout Scotland, aged 3 to 18. CfE aims to place children and young people at the heart of their own learning. It identifies the development of four fundamental capacities as an essential goal for education, helping children and young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors.

Local

Promoting Positive Relationships, Learning and Behaviour Policy (2025)
Orkney's 'Promoting Positive Relationships, Learning and Behaviour Policy' was developed and adopted in 2025. In alignment with national frameworks supporting education and children's services, it recognises positive relationships as essential for children and young people's wellbeing, and key to effective learning and teaching. The policy recognises the capacity for self-regulation as the ultimate goal of school-based behaviour regulation policies. It highlights the role of empathy and supportive relationships for the development of self-regulation through co-regulation, combined with high expectations and firm boundaries. Guidance is provided for the creation of school-level policies in this area, including the place of consequences in response to unacceptable behaviours.

Anti-Bullying Policy for Our Children and Young People (2024)
Orkney's 'Anti-Bullying Policy for Our Children and Young People' was first approved in July 2018, and was recently updated in June 2024. This policy states, 'Bullying takes place in the context of relationships; it is behaviour that can make people feel hurt, threatened, frightened and left out. This behaviour happens face to face and online' (Respectme n.d.). The updated policy emphasises the importance of promoting positive relationships in education settings and school communities, with a focus on enhancing relational approaches, nurture as a whole-school approach, and empathy. The policy includes a section devoted to 'Use of Technology' in the context of cyber-bullying, and advises the 'promotion of positive relationships and behaviour in a digital context' as part of 'a whole school/establishment approach[es] to health and wellbeing.'

4. Guiding Principles

Relational Approaches

Relational approaches, Nurture, and Empathy lie at the heart of education in Orkney. The two key policy drivers, Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it Right for Every Child, recognise that developing the wellbeing of children, young people, and staff is essential for creating the right environment for effective learning and teaching.

Acceptable Behaviour

Our children and young people need to develop their understanding that certain behaviours are unacceptable, whether they occur in an online environment, the playground, the classroom, or anywhere else. Any breach of expectations in relation to digital technology should be handled in the same way as other unacceptable behaviours, in line with each school's positive relationships, learning and behaviour policies. Staff are expected to respond consistently to any irresponsible use of mobile technology and will explain to children and young people why certain behaviours are unacceptable, and what the potential impact of such behaviours might be.

Parents and Carers

Parents and carers have a critical role to play, working in partnership with school staff to support children, uphold these guiding principles, and ensure that school policies are respected.

Digital Citizenship

The key principles of digital citizenship most relevant when considering the use of personal devices are:

- **Digital etiquette** (standards of conduct when using any mobile devices).
- **Digital rights and responsibilities** (what people can do if they feel uncomfortable with digital communication and how they can report misuse).
- **Digital security** (precautions that can be taken to ensure digital safety).

These areas should be explicitly addressed as schools develop their policies on personal digital devices.

Building Strengths

By supporting schools with this Policy, Orkney Islands Council seeks to build the following four areas:

- **Empowerment of the adults** whose role it is to jointly nurture Orkney's children, foster their development, prioritise their wellbeing, and ensure their safety (school staff in partnership with parents/carers).
- **Empowerment of young people and children** to express their views, and to have their views properly taken into account – especially where decisions are being made which directly affect them.

- **Establishment and maintenance of good digital citizenship** within all Orkney's school communities.
- **Agreement across our wider community** to show solidarity and commitment to each other by adhering to a common set of principles and boundaries, and to the Personal Device Policy that each school will have in place.

5. Big Messages from the Local Consultation

In June/July 2025, stakeholders within all of Orkney's school communities were invited to have their say on personal mobile digital devices in schools, by completing a detailed online survey. There were different versions of the survey for families, pupils, and school staff. 1260 responses were received in total. Overall, the feedback delivered the following **big messages**:

- Schools need to embed and maintain nurture and empathy at the centre of their school approach, to ensure pupils feel safe.
- Primary schools should remain free of personal devices.
- Where schools want pupils to access online resources for educational purposes, a good-quality, managed device would need to be provided for each pupil.
- Schools should collaborate with pupils, parents/carers and staff, to develop and maintain a clear and effective policy.
- At Secondary School, consider having different levels of restriction for different age-groups (e.g. fewer restrictions for pupils in S5/S6 who can demonstrate the ability to use personal devices responsibly)
- Work with pupils, with a particular focus on Upper Primary and S1-4, and their parents/carers, to nurture the responsibility needed for having devices at school.
- Ongoing CPD/training for staff throughout Secondary settings, so they are confident to support digital learning and citizenship.

6. Goals of this Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide schools in Orkney with advice on how to develop a local school policy that encourages safe and responsible use of personal mobile technology in school, and beyond.

This Policy is written to support all of Orkney's schools to develop their own policies on the use of personal mobile digital devices. The ultimate goal is for all Orkney's schools to foster, consolidate, and maintain:

- **Safety for all** (children, young people, and adults).
- **Optimal conditions for learning** (with distractions minimised).
- **Optimal conditions for positive social interaction and development.**
- **Good mental wellbeing.**
- **Digital learning** (scaffolding **digital citizenship** as well as **knowledge** and **skills**).

7. Expectations and Boundaries

This Policy seeks to assist each school in Orkney to develop a robust policy in line with National Guidance, current legislation, research, and best practice, and informed by consultation with school communities across Orkney.

- Each school is expected to create and maintain its own Policy for Personal Mobile Digital Devices, in line with this Policy.
- Mobile phones and other personal electronic devices may only be used – if at all – in accordance with the school's Policy.
- Each Policy will be developed by the Head Teacher/Senior Management Team in consultation with the school community, and will reflect the character and needs of the school.
- The content of each school's Policy is ultimately the responsibility of the Head Teacher.

At the current time, a range of approaches in this area is evident across Orkney's schools. Some of the variation is due to difference in resources (e.g. in the ratio of managed devices for pupils, which currently varies from school to school). There is therefore likely to be a degree of variation from one school to another in terms of the policies they develop. This Local Authority policy needs to acknowledge the existing differences, making strong recommendations whilst incorporating sufficient flexibility to meet schools where they are currently at, and support each school to move forward with their policy development to promote lasting and meaningful progress in this vitally important area.

Orkney Islands Council will fully support each school to put into place and enforce their clearly stated school policy, including any Secondary and Junior High Schools that decide personal devices may not be accessed at any time during the school day, or indeed brought to school at all.

The following have been identified as essential points for schools to incorporate into their School-Level Policies:

PRIMARY-STAGE PUPILS

- No personal mobile digital devices to be accessed, seen, heard, or used during the school day, including breaks and lunchtime.

SECONDARY-STAGE PUPILS

FOR S1 to S4

- No personal mobile digital devices to be accessed, seen, heard, or used during and between classes.
- Schools should make a decision regarding whether, and under what terms, pupils might have access to a personal mobile digital device during break and lunchtime.

FOR S5 and S6

- Schools should consider whether, and under what terms, there might be a different level of restrictions for S5 and S6 pupils who can demonstrate the ability to use personal devices responsibly.

STAFF AND VISITORS

- Staff and visitors to the school will make every effort to ensure that their own personal mobile digital devices are silent and away in learning environments.

PARENTS/CARERS

- If a parent/carer needs to contact their child during the school day, this is done via the school office and in accordance with school policy. Parents/carers should not expect their child or young person to be contactable via their personal mobile digital device during or between classes.

NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS

- Mobile phones and personal electronic devices are not allowed in examination rooms.

SCHOOL-LEVEL EXCEPTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMSTANCES*

- Each school must consider individual circumstances of specific children and young people, and ensure exceptions are in place where necessary.

NOTES

**Examples of children and young people who may require exceptions include:*

- *those who are young carers and require ongoing contact with family members*
- *those who need a mobile phone for medical purposes (e.g. for monitoring diabetes);*
- *those who experience concern or anxiety, including whilst away from home on school trips;*
- *those with additional support needs where access to their mobile phone is used as part of a planned approach to managing their learning needs;*
- *those with disabilities who use their mobile phone as part of a reasonable adjustment, including access to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), etc.*

It will be the duty of each school to manage such cases appropriately and to review at regular intervals any exceptions granted.

8. Use of Personal Electronic Devices

Orkney Islands Council expects all members of the school community – whether or not they have been granted 'exception' status by their school - to use personal electronic devices safely and responsibly at all times. Users must adhere to the following principles:

- **Respectful and Courteous Use:** All users of personal electronic devices must apply the principles of respectful and courteous use. Children, young people, and staff must respect the privacy of others by not creating, accessing, sharing, or distributing personal information without their consent. On school premises during the school day, personal electronic devices should not be used for the purpose of creating or sharing personal information featuring other members of the school community. This includes photos, videos, audio recordings, and other digital content. Empathic communication will be modelled and explicitly taught in all Orkney's schools, as described in Orkney Islands Council's 'Promoting Positive Relationships, Learning and Behaviour Policy' (2025). Cyberbullying, harassment, and any form of unsafe, harmful, or discourteous use will not be tolerated, and will be swiftly dealt with according to the terms of Orkney Islands Council's 'Anti-Bullying Policy for Our Children and Young People' (2024).
- **Safe and Secure Online Practices:** Orkney Islands Council expects all members of each school community to adhere to best practices for online safety and security (e.g. use of strong passwords; being vigilant to protect against scams, phishing and malware)
- **Responsibility for Devices:** Children and young people who bring personal electronic devices to school are responsible for their care and usage. The school cannot accept responsibility for damage or loss of any device. Appropriate insurance for any digital device brought to school is advised.
- **Device Storage:** Each school will develop its own protocol for device storage. It is recommended that schools move towards implementation of a secure system for children and young people to store and achieve physical separation from their devices, at least for designated parts of the school day. Lockers in corridors could be a possible option, or some other method of making devices inaccessible in accordance with the school's policy.
- As a minimum, at times and in locations when devices should be 'off and away', they will be switched off and stored in a zipped compartment of the child or young person's bag (not on their person, e.g. in a pocket in clothing).
- Schools must clearly display the rules around device usage and potential consequences for non-compliance.
- **Establishing and Enforcing School Policy:** It is suggested that secondary schools develop a Personal Mobile Digital Devices Contract for pupils and a parent/guardian to sign at the start of each school year. If a child or young person is found using a device in violation of the school's policy, the school will remind them of their agreement, as signed up to. If the violation persists, the

school may ask the child or young person to hand the device to a member of staff, and the school will store it securely until the end of the school day. In the event that such a request from a member of staff is refused, parents/carers will be contacted. Where a device is handed to a member of staff, legal responsibility for the device will pass to the school. The member of staff should place the device immediately into a sealed envelope clearly marked with the name of the child or young person, and send or deliver the device to the school office. The office will record receipt of the device, and place it in the school safe (or alternative secure storage system) until collection by the device owner at the end of the school day. A member of school staff will ensure that the device is signed for upon retrieval.

9. Legal Aspects

- There are a number of online behaviours that could constitute a criminal offence. In responding to any specific behaviours, towards children and young people or staff, it is important for schools and education authorities to have an awareness of the relevant legislative landscape and to seek their own legal advice where appropriate.
- Legislation relevant to aspects of online safety, including the safe and responsible use of mobile phones, can be found in appendix C5 of the Scottish version of the online safety policy tool for schools, 360 Degree Safe Scotland . The 360 Degree Safe Scotland self-review tool is free to use and is intended to help schools review their online safety policy and practice.
- School policies on promoting positive relationships and behaviour, and anti-bullying, need to provide the framework which underpins responses to cases where digital devices have been, or are perceived to have been, used inappropriately. This includes where a device has caused a distraction from learning.
- School staff cannot access content on a child or young person's digital device without their consent, or the consent of their parent or carer where the child or young person does not have capacity to consent.
- Policies should make clear that there are consequences for misusing digital devices. Where potentially criminal events have been recorded using mobile technology, this should be drawn to the attention of the police.
- Taking photographs, videos, or audio recordings of any individual without their permission may be regarded as a breach of that person's rights, and may, in some instances, be regarded as an offence by the police.
- Should images or recordings be uploaded onto social networks without permission from the data subject, the individual should be asked to remove this as part of the normal behaviour policy of the school.

10. Looking Ahead: Goals 2026 – 2029

The Personal Mobile Digital Devices: Policy for Educational Establishments will need to be reviewed and amended regularly. The first review will commence in February 2028. It is necessary to identify the desired impacts of this policy by the time the review process gets under way.

Desired Outcomes by February 2029 (End of Year 3)

By February 2029, it is expected that the actions to be undertaken over the intervening 3 years will have shifted the landscape in Orkney's schools as follows:

<u>OUTCOME 1: POLICY-BUILDING</u>

- Every school will be confident in how they deal with personal mobile digital devices, clearly articulated in a well-embedded school-level policy which is underpinned by the Local Authority's Policy and aligned with the Scottish Government's guidance on this topic.

<u>OUTCOME 2: ENHANCEMENT OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS</u>

- All schools will have established respectful storage systems to enable pupils to be 'personal-device-free' from start of the morning till lunchtime; and from start of the afternoon till end of school day.
- Fewer pupils will be relying on personal digital devices to help them feel safe; socially included; able to self-regulate; or able to self-organise.

<u>OUTCOME 3: DIGITAL LEARNING STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT</u>

- All pupils will be using managed devices for school learning tasks requiring digital technology, negating any need for pupils to be equipped with a personal device, except for pupils with recognised 'exception' status.
- Families will feel well-supported by their children's school(s), and well-informed in the area of digital technology and children's development, enabling them to confidently adopt the approach and hold the boundaries that best suit their children in this area.

Working towards the Desired Outcomes (Year 1)

- Local Authority Policy in place.
- School Policies developed, implemented (and existing ones reviewed); and impact being monitored.
- Schools will have explored arrangements for the respectful and secure storage of pupils' personal devices.
- Orkney-Wide Digital Learning Strategy in the consultation phase.
- Family Learning strand being developed, with focus on learning conversations with parents and carers.

Working towards the Desired Outcomes (Year 2)

- Orkney's Digital Learning Strategy being constructed, with strands relating to infrastructure and to curriculum (P1 to S6).
- Increased availability of spaces and activities in schools, to optimise pupil enjoyment of device-free unstructured time.
- Ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of secure storage arrangements in schools.

Working towards the Desired Outcomes (Year 3)

- Orkney's Digital Learning Strategy in place, supported by adequate provision of managed devices.
- Ongoing learning strands for pupils, parents, and staff are established across school settings and communities.
- Updated 3-year Local Authority Policy (informed by review of impact) in place (ready to inform updated School Policies, for completion in 2030).

11. Implementation

Several of Orkney's schools already have a formal written policy in place. Many of these policies have been painstakingly developed following extensive communication with the school community of pupils, parents/carers, and staff. It is hoped that this Policy will ensure these schools feel supported by the Council in their commitment to this vital work. It will assist those schools without a written policy to create one, and encourage the other schools to review their existing policies in line with this document, with the goal of achieving an intentional and increasing level of consistency in all schools across Orkney as we move forward together.

OUTCOME 1: POLICY BUILDING

Outcomes	**Year 1 Actions**	**Year 2 Actions**	**Year 3 Actions**	**Lead**	**Monitoring**
Policies in place at Local Authority Level and individual School Level, generating confidence, consistency, and a sense of togetherness.	<u>During February 2026</u> -Present proposed Local Authority Policy to Elected Members for ratification. -Request all schools commit in their 2026/27 School Improvement Plan to create their own school-level policies, in line with the Local Authority Policy, and National Guidance. <u>Autumn Term 2026</u> -All Secondary Schools and Junior High Schools plan and carry out consultation with stakeholder groups (pupils, parents, staff) – to inform the	-Interim monitoring of impact of the Local Authority Policy <u>Spring Term 2027</u> SECONDARY and JH SCHOOLS -Launch Policy (2027/28), All schools promote and embed their Policy	-Review and assess impact of the Local Authority Policy. -Create Updated Local Authority Policy, to guide schools over the coming 3 years (2029 to 2032). <u>Spring Term 2028</u> All schools review their School Policy in consultation with pupils, parents, and staff: -What is working well? -What do we need to change? -What are the desired next steps for 2028 to 2030?	Director for Education, Communities, and Housing School Head Teachers and Senior Management	

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	drafting (or review if already in place) of each school's Personal Mobile Digital Devices in School policy. Introduce the Policy (or Reviewed Policy) and its implications to pupils, families, and staff.		All schools submit Reviewed Policies to OJNC for scrutiny; then promote and embed their Reviewed Policies.		

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OUTCOME 2: ENHANCEMENT OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Outcomes	**Year 1 Actions**	**Year 2 Actions**	**Year 3 Actions**	**Lead**	**Monitoring**
Nurturing school environments which promote wellbeing and support face-to-face interaction.	-Consultation with pupils – especially in Secondary - to design environments for enjoyable, device-free social and break-times (with consideration given to nurturing spaces for all, and activities that build social ease and confidence for all). -Development of secure arrangements for personal mobile digital devices to be stored for periods during the school day.	Ongoing collaboration with Secondary pupils to construct reassuring environments and activities for social and break-times. Continue to monitor the secure storage arrangements provided within each school.	Ongoing collaboration with Secondary pupils to construct reassuring environments and activities for social and break-times. Continue to monitor the secure storage arrangements provided within each school.	School Head Teachers in consultation with the OIC Education Department.	

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OUTCOME 3: DIGITAL LEARNING STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Outcomes	**Year 1 Actions**	**Year 2 Actions**	**Year 3 Actions**	**Lead**	**Monitoring**
Orkney will have a comprehensive Digital Learning Strategy, ensuring our schools receive the support and resources they need to foster the digital skills and citizenship of all members of our learning communities.	Early-stage development of Orkney-Wide Digital Learning Strategy (exploration and creation of working groups to develop the strategy). This will include: -liaison with other Local Authorities, to find out what approaches are being taken elsewhere, and how effective they are. -exploring the provision of 1-to-1 managed devices in Orkney's Secondary settings.	Development of Orkney-Wide Digital Learning Strategy. This will include: -consultation, drafting, and ratification of the strategy. -provision of 1-to-1 managed devices as decided. -Development and maintenance of a curriculum strand (Universal) to scaffold pupils to become skilled and responsible digital citizens	Implementation of Orkney-Wide Digital Learning Strategy. This will include: -Strategy in place, supported by adequate provision of managed devices. -Ongoing learning strands (for pupils; for parents; for staff) are becoming firmly embedded.	Heads of Service (Education and ICT), perhaps in collaboration with counterparts in other Local Authorities and prospective ICT providers. Heads of Service (Education and ICT), in collaboration with each school's designated Educational Psychologist	

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OUTCOME 3 (continued): DIGITAL LEARNING STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Outcomes	Year 1 Actions	Year 2 Actions	Year 3 Actions	Lead	Monitoring
	- Development of materials to engage with parents on topic of Personal Mobile Digital Devices and how best to manage their impact on children's development. -drafting a curriculum strand (Universal) to scaffold pupils to become skilled and responsible digital citizens.				

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12. Evaluation

The large-scale survey carried out in 2025 will form an invaluable baseline for comparison in 2029. This will enable the effectiveness of the Policy, and the School-based Policies informed by it, to be evaluated.

It will also be important to capture baseline and review measures to evaluate any tangible benefits from the learning strands developed by schools in collaboration with the Educational Psychology Service.

The above Table allows for review of progress at key evaluation points.

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14. Members of Policy Working Group

James Wylie	Director of Education, Communities, and Housing
Peter Diamond	Head of Education (to 31/10/2025)
Wendy Bowen	Head of Education (01/11/2025 to present)
Thomas Aldred	Service Manager, ICT
Jane Partridge	Service Manager, Secondary Education
Morag Miller	Service Manager, Primary Education
Imogen Kerr	Educational Psychologist
Cathy Lyner	Principal Educational Psychologist
Ruth McKay	Head Teacher for Kirkwall Grammar School
Paul Barber	Head Teacher for Stromness Academy
Petra McLay	Head Teacher for Stronsay Junior High School
Catherine Mackenzie	Head Teacher for St Margaret's Hope, Burray, and North Ronaldsay Primary Schools
Cheryl Rafferty	Community Learning and Development Team Lead
Richard Smith	Community Learning and Development Team
Rona Harcus	Parent Council Rep (Secondary)
Lorna Garson	Parent Council Rep (Primary)
Liz McQuaid	Pupil Council Rep

15. Annex 1 – Consultation Process and Findings

In June/July 2025, a large-scale survey on personal devices in schools was carried out by Orkney Islands Council's education department, with versions for families, school pupils (P6 to S6), and school staff across Orkney. It is important to note that parents/carers receiving the family survey were given the following instruction: 'This survey is designed to be completed as a family. Please chat through the questions with your child(ren) and try to agree on the answers where you can.'

There were **1260 questionnaire returns** in total, broken down as follows:

- 324 from families.
- 596 from secondary pupils.
- 177 from primary pupils.
- 99 from secondary staff.
- 64 from primary staff.

The high level of returns reflects the importance attached to this topic by all those concerned with school education and child development. In August/September, a sequence of Focus Groups was carried out, to explore more deeply some of the dilemmas that had been highlighted through the survey. The four Focus Groups prompted discussion and captured views of pupil council members, parent council chairs, head teachers, and paediatric speech and language therapists in Orkney.

From the local research, a consensus is clear that personal devices are not appropriate within Orkney's Primary education settings.

The picture is more complex within the Secondary environment, where the majority of pupils have become used to carrying and regularly accessing personal devices throughout the day. The survey tells us that 95% of secondary-aged pupils in Orkney own a smartphone. Most pupils (82%) have one by the age of 12, and there is a common perception that pupils at Secondary school need a smartphone. Secondary pupils are reluctant to leave devices at home or be physically separated from their device. Most want to use their devices at break/lunch. About 1 in 5 of the 596 Secondary-aged respondents say they are 'addicted to social media'. Many of Orkney's Secondary-aged pupils are also used to using their personal devices for education purposes, especially as Orkney does not currently have 1-to-1 provision of managed devices for pupils to use at home and at school. Pupils do acknowledge that personal devices must not be allowed to distract lessons, and most favour a policy of 'off and away' in bag/pocket unless the teacher requests pupils to use them.

In addition:

Many Secondary pupils **feel** safer when they have a device physically with them:

- while at school (47%).
- travelling to and from school (64%).

Some pupils find face-to-face interaction uncomfortable, and prefer to have a device during social times. A few say they would not cope socially without a device.

Many Secondary pupils and staff rely on the technology available through pupils' personal devices to support learning in school.

The majority (88%) of families say that having time away from their devices would be good for their children's wellbeing.

The majority (80%) of pupils who had participated in phone-free residential trips were positive about the experience.

It is clear that any changes in pupil access to their devices would need to be carefully planned, phased, and characterised by good communication and active involvement of the pupils themselves.

Personal devices currently make it easy for pupils in many of Orkney's school settings to have unregulated online access, at least at certain points during the school day. There is concern that the presence of unregulated devices gives greater opportunity for unkind behaviour to take place between pupils:

- Two thirds of Secondary school families, and 85% of Secondary school staff, state that **bullying** is made more likely by the presence of personal devices.

Two thirds of Secondary school families also think that:

- The presence of personal devices makes classrooms a **worse environment for learning** (two thirds of Secondary school staff also think this).
- Allowing personal devices in Secondary School makes it **harder for pupils to socialise at break times** (81% of staff agree – a view strongly shared by Orkney's Paediatric Speech and Language Therapists at their Focus Group on 22/09/2025).

There is a general desire for school policy on personal devices:

- Staff and families expressed keenness to see **consistent regulations** across Orkney's schools.
- Many comments throughout the survey called for personal device policies to be firmly **enacted** and **enforced**, to ensure pupils take school rules seriously in this area.

When asked in May 2025 whether they already had a formal, written school policy in place, Orkney's Head Teachers responded as follows:

Primary Schools: only 1 of 17 Primary schools already had a formal written policy.

Mainland Secondary Schools: One of the two Mainland Secondaries already had a formal written policy.

Junior High Schools: All 3 Junior Highs had a formal written policy.

Overall, the survey delivered the following **big messages**:

- Schools need to embed nurture and empathy at the centre of their school approach, to ensure pupils feel safe.
- Primary schools should remain free of personal devices.
- Where schools want pupils to access online resources for educational purposes, a good-quality, managed device would need to be provided for each pupil.
- Schools should collaborate with pupils, parents/carers and staff, to develop and maintain a clear and effective policy.
- At Secondary School, consider having different levels of restriction for different age-groups (e.g. fewer restrictions for pupils in S5/S6 who can demonstrate the ability to use personal devices responsibly).
- Work with pupils, with a particular focus on Upper Primary and S1-4, and their parents/carers, to nurture the responsibility needed for having devices at school.
- Ongoing CPD/training for staff throughout Secondary settings, so they are confident to support digital learning and citizenship.