

Educational Services Committee
7 January 2003

Irvine, 7 January 2003 - At a Meeting of the Educational Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Peter McNamara, Jacqueline Browne, John Reid, Thomas Barr, John Bell, Ian Clarkson, Jane Gorman, James Jennings, Father Matthew McManus, Rev. Sandy Montgomerie, David Munn, David O'Neill, John Sillars, Gordon Smith, Samuel Taylor, Christine Welch and Richard Wilkinson.

In Attendance

B. Devine, Chief Executive, J. Travers, Corporate Director (Educational Services), B. Gardner, J. Leckie, J. Ward, L. Owens, J. Tulips, Heads of Service (Educational Services), P. Doak, Senior Accountant (Finance). A. Wattie, Communications Officer (Communications), M. Adams and J. Bannatyne, Corporate and Democratic Support Officers (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor McNamara.

Apologies for Absence

David Gallagher, Samuel Gooding and Tracey McPherson.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 November 2002, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Presentation: ICT in Schools: Broadband Developments

The Committee received a presentation from a Head of Service (J. Leckie) and a report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the broadband communications developments within schools in North Ayrshire.

As part of the National Grid for Learning Programme which assisted in the provision of modern ICT equipment for schools in North Ayrshire, the ten secondary schools were linked to Cunninghame House by broadband connections. Use has been made of the remaining National Grid for Learning Programme funds to improve the connections to a number of primary schools within North Ayrshire which previously relied on the dial-up telephone line system for connections to the internet and for e-mail use. The system, initially piloted in the Irvine area, is now being extended to schools within Kilwinning and the Three Towns. A key factor in the provision of broadband is the ability of local telephone exchanges to accept digital communications and the distances involved. It is proposed to network schools in the Garnock Valley, North Coast and Arran areas in a further phase of the development.

The Scottish Executive has expressed an interest in the potential to stream video over the broadband network which will make a wide range of educational resources available to schools on demand, to the standard of digital TV or DVD. The Executive has agreed to provide up to a maximum of £64,000 for the necessary hardware and some trial video material. A pilot scheme to test the ability of the new network to deliver video material to the classroom will be carried out over the next year.

The Committee agreed to the implementation of a broadband network pilot scheme as detailed in the report.

3. Dialogue Youth

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the proposals to implement the Dialogue Youth Initiative in North Ayrshire.

The Initiative is a partnership between Young Scot, CoSLA, the Scottish Executive, local authorities, their community planning partners and young people which aims to provide young people with the opportunity to be involved in the design, management and delivery of local services and to influence their development. North Ayrshire has been allocated £192,000 to develop the Initiative over the period 2002-04.

The key areas of development are Smartened Cards, local action with the Young Scot National Information Portal, personal and social education and citizenship education, the creation of a Resource and Research Base on youth issues, and encouraging the involvement of young people.

In North Ayrshire, work is currently being undertaken through the Youth Forums and Pupil Councils in all ten secondary schools. Proposed future developments include the introduction of a training programme, the establishment of an Officer Working Group to plan and co-ordinate future developments, and the recruitment of a Dialogue Youth Team which will be responsible for the day to day management of its projects.

The Committee agreed to approve the proposals for the Dialogue Youth Initiative as detailed in the report.

4. Nursery Admissions Policy

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on proposals to review the policy for admissions to all local authority nursery provision within North Ayrshire.

Although the number of nursery places available for under 3s in North Ayrshire has expanded, there are still insufficient places for all children. The current admissions policy allocates available places in accordance with 9 priority bandings. The broad interpretation which can be applied to some of the current bands often causes difficulties when allocating priority places.

It is therefore proposed that the current policy for North Ayrshire be replaced by an

Admissions Policy for children under 3 years of age and a separate Admissions Policy for children 3 - 5 years of age.

The Committee agreed to approve the new Nursery Admissions Policy as detailed in the report.

5. Adult Literacy and Numeracy Action Plans

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on additional funding provided by the Scottish Executive for Adult Literacy and Numeracy.

Following an initial allocation to the Council of Scottish Executive funding amounting to £579,838 for the period 2001/04, additional funding for adult literacy and numeracy has now been allocated by the Scottish Executive amounting to £341,634 in 2004/05 and £351,037 in 2005/06. The additional funding for 2004/06 will assist the Community Learning Partnership to both extend the range of literacies provision and improve the quality of local provision.

The Committee agreed that the Corporate Director (Educational Services) report to a future Committee on the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan for 2004/06.

6. Supply Cover for Teachers

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the operation and current status of the supply cover arrangements for teachers throughout North Ayrshire which was requested by the Committee at its meeting on 12 November 2002.

Teachers may require to be absent from school through illness, secondment, holidays, maternity leave, training etc., resulting in the services of supply teachers being required at short notice. The supply problem has been addressed within primary schools by the creation of a small pool of peripatetic supply teachers on permanent contracts who can be deployed as required. Supply teacher provision in secondary schools is more complex as they are required to cover a range of subjects.

Details of the number of teachers on the supply register for the last session, at the start of the current session, and at 6 December 2002 were provided in an appendix to the report. The figures indicate a significant fall in the availability of supply teachers as at December 2002, particularly in relation to specific subjects in secondary schools. It is anticipated that the next intake of new teachers into the teaching profession will help to resolve the current supply problem. The Corporate Director (Educational Services) undertook to provide members with additional information in relation to the appointment of part-time and full-time teaching staff.

The Committee agreed to approve the current arrangements for teacher supply cover as detailed in the report.

7. Targets for Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the levels of achievement of schools in 2001/2002 in meeting the targets set for pupils with special educational needs.

In 2001/02 all ten secondary schools, 42 primary schools and all 4 special schools in North Ayrshire set individual targets for pupils with special educational needs. There were 362 pupils included in the initiative, 194 of whom were within mainstream schools. Overall 41 of the 56 schools participating met or exceeded their target representing a success rate of 71%. This compares with a 77% success rate in session 2000/01 against a similar number of schools and pupils. The choice of benchmark will make a difference to the achievement of targets and schools will gain experience over time in setting appropriate target levels.

Noted.

8. Quality Assurance: Analysis of Examination Results for 2002

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the overall performance of secondary schools in North Ayrshire in National Examinations in 2002 and on the range of strategies in place to improve examination performance.

An analysis of examination results in respect of S4 and S5 based on a comparison with previous results for 2000/01 indicates a small year on year variation highlighting increased overall numbers of pupils gaining standard grades or equivalent. An analysis of S4 and S5 results in 2002 based on a comparison with other similar authorities indicates that North Ayrshire secondary schools continue to achieve significantly better examination results than schools serving similar areas.

A number of strategies have been put in place to improve attainment such as the October and Easter Revision Schools and other supported study opportunities.

The Committee agreed to approve the strategies put in place to improve examination performance.

9. Bursary Policy: Academic Session 2003/04

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the Further Education and Higher School Bursary Policy for Academic Session 2003/2004.

During academic session 2002/03 no significant difficulties have arisen with the operation of the Council's existing bursary policy. The Scottish Executive has advised that it is their intention to replace bursaries with educational maintenance allowances from financial year 2004/05. The Corporate Director (Educational Services) undertook to provide members of the Committee with some additional information on the level of funding available for bursaries during the current financial year.

The Committee agreed to approve the continuation of the Council's existing policy on further education and higher school bursaries into academic session 2003/04.

10. National Audit of Museums

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the proposed response to a consultation from the Scottish Executive on proposals for the development of an Action Plan for Scotland's Museums and Galleries.

The proposed response suggests a mentoring arrangement between curators in local authorities and the national institutions. It also includes concerns about the underfunding of regional museums and the disproportionate funding of Edinburgh-based national institutions.

The Committee agreed to approve the consultation response as indicated in the report.

11 Implementation of the National Cultural Strategy

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on draft guidance issued to Scottish local authorities by the Scottish Executive on the implementation of the National Cultural Strategy.

The guidance addresses nine broad areas of cultural activity covering the arts, community recreation, economic activity, health and social care, learning, libraries and information, records, and sport. It also refers to links with cross-cutting issues, such as social justice.

A response has been prepared which welcomes the links to cross cutting issues, as reflected in the Council's Cultural Strategy, and suggests an expansion of the executive summary on the guidance.

The Committee agreed to approve the comments on the draft guidance as detailed in the report for submission to the Scottish Executive.

12. Revenue Budget 2002/03: Budgetary Control

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) on the budgetary control position for Educational Services at the end of November 2002 and projections for the financial year 2002/03.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 3.30 p.m.