

Education Committee  
17 November 1998

**Irvine, 17 November 1998** - At a Meeting of the Education Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

**Present**

Thomas Morris, Irene Oldfather, Margaret Highet, Thomas Barr, Patrick Browne, James Clements, Stewart Dewar, John Donn, Samuel Gooding, Stef Holmer, Father Matthew McManus, Peter McNamara, David Munn, Alan Munro, David O'Neill, Evelyn Sillars, Gordon Smith, George Steven and Reverend John Taylor.

**In Attendance**

The Corporate Director (Educational Services); B. Gardner, Head of Education Resources; J. Tulips, J. Leckie and L. Owens, Heads of Education Services; J. McMath, Senior Adviser (Educational Services); L. Morton, Assistant Principal Officer (Financial Services); and J. Bannatyne, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

**Chair**

Mr. Morris in the Chair.

**Apologies for Absence**

Thomas Dickie and John Sillars.

**1. Minutes Confirmed**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 6 October 1998, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

**2. New Deal for Schools: Capital Resources**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on proposals for the allocation of additional capital resources available to the Council through the Budget 1997 New Deal for Schools Programme amounting to £788,000. The Secretary of State has indicated that these funds are in addition to the investment in the schools being made from other sources available to the Council and will be used to provide for the renewal, repair or improvement of school buildings and to enhance facilities for technology.

The Committee agreed to approve the proposals detailed in the report for the allocation of the additional funding for the financial year 1999/2000.

### **3. Class Size Reduction Initiative**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the staffing allocation to primary schools in support of a Government initiative to reduce the maximum size of classes in P1 - P3 to 30 by August 2001. The Council was offered an initial grant of £137,650 to pilot this development in the current financial year and this funding will provide approximately 10.1 FTE staffing. Following extensive discussions with the Head Teachers of eligible schools a model for the allocation of staffing was agreed. The proposed allocation, full details of which were provided in the report, has been communicated to the Scottish Office and consent has been given to proceed with the initiative. Staffing additions have now been implemented in the relevant schools and the impact of the initiative will be monitored on a continuous basis.

The Committee agreed that a further report on the outcome of the initiative be submitted.

### **4. Expansion of Pre-School Education for Three Year Olds**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the Government's funding arrangements for the expansion of nursery education in respect of three year olds including proposals for the development of new nursery classes within North Ayrshire.

The Council provides 100% nursery education provision for four year olds which currently amounts to 1100 places in Local Authority nurseries with 505 places being provided by the private and voluntary sector. The Council also currently provides 197 places for three year olds with 550 places provided by the private and voluntary sector. There will be an estimated 1650 children in their ante pre-school year in session 1999/2000.

The Council currently has two nursery schools, three community nurseries and 26 nursery classes. Details were given of proposals to provide an additional 160 places in five primary schools and on proposals for the expansion of four existing nursery classes within primary schools to provide an additional 80 places resulting in a total additional provision of 240 part-time nursery places within Local Authority nurseries. It is further proposed to consolidate and expand the Council's partnership with the private and voluntary sector by encouraging additional pre-five groups in the voluntary sector to become partners with the Local Authority in the provision of nursery education and by encouraging existing partner groups to expand their service to children in their ante pre-school year. Additional financial resources of £32m in the financial year 1999-2000; £51m in 2000-2001; and £55m in 2001-2002 will be provided to Local Authorities on a phased basis. The Council will achieve 100% provision of nursery education places for children in their pre-school year and in their ante pre-school year by school session 2001-2002.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the proposed expansion of nursery classes within primary schools; and (b) that the partnership with primary and voluntary sector pre-five groups be continued and expanded.

### **5. Standards and Quality in Primary and Secondary Schools 1994/98: Modern Languages**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on a recent HM Inspectorate report on the teaching of modern languages.

The report gives comprehensive details of the key strengths and weaknesses of the teaching of modern languages in primary and secondary schools.

The Scottish Education Minister has announced the setting up of a Languages Action Group which will work with the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum on a number of tasks.

Three North Ayrshire primary schools were included in the sample taken for the report and no specific adverse comments were received from the Inspector who described the practice in two

of the schools as exemplary.

It is appropriate to review the current practice in the light of comments made in the report. However, the position of modern languages in primary and secondary schools within North Ayrshire is encouraging.

The Committee agreed to approve the continuation of the language initiatives established in North Ayrshire.

## **6. Response to the Riddell Committee Consultation**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) presenting the Council's response to a consultation from a Scottish Office Advisory Committee under the chairmanship of Professor Sheila Riddell inviting views on a number of issues in relation to the educational provision for children with severe low incidence disabilities. The report gave details of the Council's response which had already been forwarded to the Advisory Committee to meet an early November 1998 deadline, subject to Committee approval.

The Committee agreed to homologate the terms of the response to the consultation document.

## **7. Classroom Assistants Pilot Programme**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the staffing allocation to primary schools in support of the Classroom Assistants Pilot Programme.

In accordance with the previous decision of the Committee to proceed with a pilot programme in relation to the proposed introduction of classroom assistants, and to identify £30,000 to support the initiative, a Working Group comprising Head Teachers, representatives of teaching and non teaching Trade Unions, representatives from two colleges of further education and appropriate Council Officers was established. It has now reached consensus on a suitable job description, salary scale and training programme for classroom assistants in primary schools, comprehensive details of which were provided in the report. Funding available in the current financial year will provide approximately 8.0 FTE staffing and a proposed training programme will be finalised following the appointment of the new postholders. Information was also provided on the criteria used to identify the schools to participate in the Classroom Assistant Pilot Programme and it was stressed that the job description for classroom assistants did not include the professional duties carried out by qualified teachers. The Head of Education resources will meet with Trade Union representatives for further clarification of principal responsibilities as necessary.

The Committee agreed that a further report be submitted on the outcome of the pilot programme.

## **8. North Ayrshire Junior Choir**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on a proposal to establish a North Ayrshire Junior Choir.

To ensure the continuing development of musical activities a successful application was made to the British Federation of Youth Choirs for funding to support the establishment of a North Ayrshire Junior Choir. The Federation have awarded £1,500 per annum for two years to support this initiative. Initially the choir will be formed from P6 and P7 pupils within the Three Towns area. It is intended that the Junior Choir will not only enhance involvement in music but also provide pupils with a strong foundation for later participation in the North Ayrshire Schools Choir.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the establishment of a North Ayrshire Junior Choir; and (b) that further reports be submitted to the Committee as the initiative develops.

## **9. School Attendance Initiative**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the outcome of a pilot project designed to improve the levels of school attendance within a cluster group of schools in North Ayrshire.

The project involved the cluster group of Irvine Royal Academy and its five associated primary schools. Its aims were to determine accurately the extent and causes of absence in the schools and in consultation with staff to devise, implement and subsequently evaluate appropriate interventions for improving school attendance. It was also proposed to disseminate the findings to all North Ayrshire schools in due course.

A needs analysis was conducted by means of structured interviews with senior management of the schools, an examination of the registration system of the secondary school, an analysis of attendance records of P7, S1, S3 and S4 stages and questionnaires to pupils in the S1, S3 and S4 stages of secondary school. The report provided details of the main findings of the analysis and on a number of actions focusing on the secondary school which were subsequently planned, implemented and monitored. The project which called for a rigorous evaluation of the problem along with the development of creative solutions has had a significant impact and has proved helpful in creating an approach to promoting school attendance.

The Committee agreed that the results of the project be disseminated to all North Ayrshire Schools.

## **10. Information and Communications Technology Training for Teachers and School Librarians**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on New Opportunities Funding available for training teachers and school librarians and on proposals to pursue training provider bids.

The Government has allocated £250m of lottery revenue to support the training of teachers and school librarians in the uses of information and communications technology within schools to be disbursed to Education Authorities by the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). The funds available can only be used to secure training provision for appropriate staff, much of which will be school based. Training needs are to be identified through an audit process. Education Authorities will either be able to select training providers from approved lists or can also bid to become approved providers of training. The NOF has indicated that preference will be given to consortia of organisations who can demonstrate particular expertise in the areas of ICT training and development of high quality materials. The Council has already received informal approaches and expressions of interest from several potential partners, details of which were provided. It is proposed that negotiations now take place with potential partners with a view to constructing a bid for training provider status.

The Committee agreed (a) that the Corporate Director (Educational Services) arrange for bids to be considered on behalf of North Ayrshire Council to provide training for teachers and school librarians; (b) that suitable partners be approached with a view to constructing joint bids for this training; and (c) that a further report be brought to the Education Committee on the outcome of the bidding process.

## **11. Composite Classes in Primary Schools**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on proposals to issue detailed advice and information leaflets on the formation of composite classes to Head Teachers and parents respectively.

The information contained in the leaflets was prepared by a Review Group consisting of the Head of Service, Senior Adviser and experienced Head Teachers from a range of primary schools

which met on several occasions to consider the wide range of issues relating to composite classes. Draft leaflets were issued to two clusters of primary schools for consultation and in addition the views of parents were sought. The report gave detailed information on the content of the leaflets which will be issued to all schools and school boards throughout North Ayrshire.

The Committee agreed to approve the issue of detailed advice leaflets and information leaflets on composite classes to Head Teachers and parents respectively.

## **12. Age and Stage Restrictions at Standard Grade and Higher: Consultation Response**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) presenting the Council's response to the Scottish Office consultation paper "Age and Stage Restrictions at Standard Grade and Higher" which had invited views on changes to the conditions governing the entry of candidates for examinations managed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) in relation to those conditions which place restrictions on the age or stage of candidates. The consultation paper was circulated to all secondary and special schools, school boards and members of staff within the Education service and full details were provided of the comments received and of the Council's subsequent response. The response had already been forwarded to the Scottish Office to meet the deadline of 13 November 1998 subject to Committee approval.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to homologate the terms of the response to the consultation document.

## **13. Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (SCCC)/Scottish Council for Educational Technology (SCET): Consultation Response**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) presenting the Council's response to a consultation paper on the Review of the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum and the Scottish Council for Educational Technology. The paper seeks views on how national advice on the Curriculum in Scotland should be provided and on what are considered to be the best national arrangements for developing practical guidance on the Curriculum for use in schools. The views of the Council were sought on the following three options:-

Option 1 - no substantial change with both the SCCC and SCET as separate bodies on broadly their present remits;

Option 2 - to merge the SCCC and SCET into one public body; and

Option 3 - to merge the SCCC and SCET as in Option 2 while separating the advisory role of both organisations and creating a separate Advisory Body.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to approve the Council's response in the terms set out in the report which indicates Option 2 as the Council's preference.

## **14. Public Art in Schools**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on bids submitted to the Scottish Arts Council Capital Projects Lottery Department for public art development funding in respect of Beith Primary School and the new school for the Lawthorn area in Irvine.

At Beith Primary School a scheme to develop a series of integrated works of art and craft into the new building was proposed under the theme "Exploring Time" and this has attracted a grant of £20,000 from the Scottish Arts Council. The capital project to build a new school at Lawthorn, Irvine provided an opportunity for a development study to discuss and promote design innovations in new school buildings and a proposal for a feasibility study for the new school has attracted a grant amounting to £11,000 from the Scottish Arts Council.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the developments outlined in the report; and (b) that further reports be submitted as the public art in schools programme develops.

#### **15. Environmental Studies 5-14**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the Council's response to a consultative document from the Scottish Office on Environmental Studies 5-14.

The 5-14 Environmental Studies Guidelines published in 1993 as part of the 5-14 development programme have proved too complex in both content and design. Consequently HM Inspectors have commissioned a review of the guidelines to be carried out by the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (SCCC). The report outlined the aims of the review and provided comprehensive details on the consultation proposals and the Council's response.

The Committee agreed to approve the Council's response to the consultation as detailed in the report.

#### **16. School Transport: Privilege Passes**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on a proposal to allocate privilege passes on school transport to pupils who would not normally be eligible for consideration under the existing Council school transport policy.

Places on school transport are currently allocated on the basis of children who are eligible for assistance with transport to school, children living in the catchment area who do not qualify being considered for a privilege pass in terms of home to school walking distance and children who attend the school by placing request being balloted for places as in the past.

It is now proposed that where there are seats remaining on dedicated school transport after allocations have been made to children in the above categories, that any other requests for assistance with transport be dealt with by ballot on the understanding that passes would only be valid in circumstances where spare seats on the school transport were available.

The Committee agreed (a) that children who would not normally be considered for assistance with school transport be given the opportunity to use additional capacity on existing dedicated school transport by a process of ballot; and (b) that a report be made to the School Transport Review Group on the operation of this scheme by summer 1999.

#### **17. Conferences/Seminars: Invitations**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on an invitation to attend a COSLA Seminar entitled "Cracking the Childcare Challenge: Partnerships not Conflict" to be held on Friday 4 December 1998 in Edinburgh which has been organised to coincide with the publication of the SOEID Guidance on the Planning of Pre-School Education and Child Care and the Establishment of Childcare Partnerships.

The Committee agreed that the Chair (or nominee) be authorised to attend.

The meeting ended at 3.20 p.m.