

Education Committee
16 September 1997

Irvine, 16 September 1997 - At a Meeting of the Education Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

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

In Attendance

The Chief Executive, The Director of Education, B. Gardner, Head of Education Resources, J. Leckie, J. Tulips and L. Owens, Heads of Education Services, M. McLarty, Principal Resource Development Officer (Education), M. Marshall, Architectural Services Manager, D. Nibloe, Principal Officer Accountancy (Financial Services) and S. Bale, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

Chair

Mr. Morris in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Thomas Barr, Father Matthew McManus and John Sillars.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 August 1997, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Ayrshire Education Business Partnership (EBP)

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the activities supported by the Ayrshire Education Business Partnership whose remit is to ensure that industry and education work together to help young people achieve their potential and contribute positively to economic development and social progress.

The EBP is a separate company which is limited by guarantee and holds charitable status. It is funded through a partnership between Enterprise Ayrshire and North, South and East Ayrshire Councils and during 1996/97, its activities included (i) a teacher placement service, with 85 primary and secondary teachers being placed with businesses with a view to enhancing the curriculum or updating their management skills; (ii) understanding industry courses, with all secondary schools in North Ayrshire participating; and (iii) the "Welcome Host" tourism and customer care course initiated by the Scottish Tourist Board and run locally for teachers and young people by the EBP.

Due to a reduction in funding, it is unlikely that the programme will be sustained at the same level but it is hoped to maintain at a core level. Assurances were given that offers of all the activities undertaken by the EBP were made to schools throughout North Ayrshire including Arran.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that the Director of Education ask the EBP to investigate involvement in the existing programmes run by Scottish Enterprise, particularly the Young Entrepreneurship Programme.

3. Consultation Paper on Scottish Qualifications for Head Teacher

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed response to the SOEID consultation exercise in relation to a proposal to “establish proper qualifications and training for the post of Head Teacher”.

Recognising the influence which the Head Teacher has on the development of a school, the Government is proposing to introduce qualifications and training for the post of Head Teacher. Whilst the proposals are welcomed in principle, clarification is required on a number of issues, including whether it should be a priority to train existing Head Teachers in the first instance and what the funding mechanism will be.

The Committee agreed to approve the response to the SOEID as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report.

4. Transport for Children with Special Educational Needs

Further to the Committee’s decision of 5 August 1997 submitted report by the Director of Education confirming that 15 contracts have now been awarded to transport pupils with special educational needs to schools and indicating that the lowest tender had been accepted in each case, following consultation with the Chair.

In response to Members’ questions, clarification was provided on the criteria for the award of certain contracts. Assurances were also given that in addition to checks being made on the drivers employed liaison was also established between the drivers and parents on the specific requirements of each child.

The Committee agreed to homologate the award of the 15 transport contracts.

Arising from the discussion on this item, the local Members raised the problem of transport from Stevenston to St. Andrew’s Academy, Saltcoats for a number of children who have been affected by the withdrawal of buses from a particular route.

After a full discussion, assurances were given by the Chair that Officers are currently considering this issue in the light of the Council’s overall transport policy.

Noted.

5. In-Service Training Course Programme 1997/98

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the nature and extent of the programme of In-Service Courses on offer to teaching staff in schools in North Ayrshire.

The 1997/98 Programme has been drawn up on the basis of comments received on last year’s courses; priorities identified by the Committee; scrutiny of school plans; and current and planned initiatives at national level.

The Committee agreed to approve the In-Service Training Programme for 1997/98.

6. Exclusions from School

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed response to the new Scottish Office (SOEID) guidance on exclusions from school and the steps taken so far to implement the new policy in North Ayrshire Schools.

The draft guidance seeks to (i) reinforce the need for policies which see exclusion as a last resort; (ii) ensure greater consistency across authorities; and (iii) introduce improved data monitoring.

On 28 January 1997, the Committee approved North Ayrshire's policy on exclusion from schools. The new procedures are now in place and the core principles within the SOEID draft guidance are already incorporated into North Ayrshire's policy. There are, however, some reservations regarding the range of categories and reasons for exclusion as proposed by SOEID, some of which are seen as dubious and unhelpful. Assurances were given that the breakdown of data required was relevant in that it was intended to identify whether the socio-economic background of a child was a determining factor in exclusion from school and also to ensure that there was no discrimination by the local authority.

The Committee agreed to approve the report as a basis for the Council's response to the SOEID.

7. Saltcoats: Caledonia Primary School: Report on Consultation

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the results of the consultation on the proposed transfer arrangements to secondary school for pupils attending Caledonia Primary School, Saltcoats.

As agreed by the Committee on 3 June 1997 the two options proposed in the consultation document were (i) that all pupils transfer to Auchendarvie Academy, Stevenston or (ii) that all pupils transfer to Ardrossan Academy. A small number of submissions were received in response to the consultation, with a number of parents simply expressing preference for one school or the other. An officer of the Education Directorate had also met with the School Board of Caledonia Primary School and given assurances that parents would still have the right to make a placing request.

As the submissions did not bring forward any significant new factors and taking into account the accommodation issues, the Committee agreed (a) that the delineated area of Auchendarvie Academy be amended to include the whole catchment area of Caledonia Primary School; (b) that the pupils attending Caledonia Primary School who would have transferred to Ardrossan Academy should instead transfer to Auchendarvie Academy with effect from August 1998; and (c) that improvements to the road access at Auchendarvie Academy to allow buses to enter the school grounds be looked at as a priority in next year's budget.

8. 5-14 Curriculum Development: Environmental Studies

Submitted report by the Director of Education on current work being undertaken jointly by East and North Ayrshire Councils in supporting the implementation of 5-14 Environmental Studies.

The 5-14 National Guidelines for Environmental Studies bring the five subject areas of science, social subjects, technology, health and information technology together within one planning framework. Following requests from teachers and schools, a Joint Steering Group from East and North Ayrshire Councils was established to develop a Framework for Planning Environmental Studies. The Framework provides advice to senior management and classroom teachers on planning whole school programmes and individual class lessons. It is proposed that advice on the assessment, recording and reporting of 5-14 Environmental Studies will be developed later this year for inclusion within the Framework. The joint working arrangement enables both authorities to support schools at a level which would not be possible for either individually.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the ongoing development programme of 5-14 Environmental Studies; and (b) that further progress reports be submitted.

9. School Admission Policy

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the outcome of the consultation on the proposed changes to the Council's policy on school admissions.

As agreed by the Committee on 3 June 1997, a consultative document was issued to all school boards and Head Teachers on proposed changes to the school admissions policy. Three responses were received, two from School Boards supporting the policy and one from a Head Teacher, also

supporting the policy, but highlighting concerns about the lack of contact with the school during planned parents meetings which can arise as a result of the timing of placing requests. Should the allocation of placing requests proceed to a ballot, a member will be present and this has been incorporated into the policy document.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the amended school admissions policy as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report; and (b) that the implementation of the policy be monitored and a further report submitted following a year's operation.

10. Education Resource Service

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the services provided by the restructured Education Resource Service.

Greenwood Teachers' Centre provides (i) centrally managed resources for access by schools; (ii) advisory and information services for schools and the Directorate; and (iii) an in-service training base for teachers.

Following the reorganisation of local government, the three Ayrshire authorities set up joint arrangements for the Education Resource Service for the first year, but South Ayrshire and East Ayrshire Councils have since withdrawn from the agreement and their share of the Resource including staffing has been disaggregated. Accordingly, the Resource Service now provides a dedicated service for North Ayrshire on the basis of need.

In primary, special or nursery schools, there are no school librarians, and these schools therefore require extensive support from the Resource Service in terms of materials such as books, course materials, videos, computer software etc. In secondary schools, which have librarians, the Resource Service is accessed for additional support, new initiatives, specialised resources etc. The Greenwood Centre itself, when not being used as a training base for the Education Directorate, can be hired to other Council Directorates and external bodies.

Future developments proposed include additional resources for the expanding nursery sector, deployment of Resource Centre staff in schools to support the 5-14 Development Programme in the primary sector, extension of the automation of secondary school libraries and developing a marketing strategy for the Greenwood Centre.

The Committee agreed to approve the developments detailed in the report.

11. Educational Support to Counteract Disadvantage

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals to standardise the methods of determining additional support for schools.

The Council has maintained and developed a system, inherited from the former Strathclyde Regional Council, of support for less advantaged pupils in schools, including elements such as additional teaching staff, additional allocation of learning support and additional entitlement to promoted posts (senior teachers). There is an inconsistency in current practice in determining which schools receive extra support, whereby in some cases the determining factor is the residence of pupils in an Area of Priority Treatment (APT) and in others is the number of pupils receiving footwear and clothing grants.

The eligibility for footwear and clothing grant relates to the circumstances of individual pupils whereas the geographical area covering an APT is less precise and considerable variations can occur within such an area. It is proposed, therefore, that future additional support in schools should, in principle, be based on eligibility for footwear and clothing grants rather than on APT areas. The amount of funding available from the Scottish Office will remain the same and it is proposed also that any such alteration be phased in to allow schools to adjust to the redistribution which will be required. Details of the re-prioritisation of support will be submitted to a future Committee.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve in principle the use of eligibility for footwear and clothing grants as the determining factor in allocating additional support to schools to counteract the effects of social disadvantage; and (b) that a further report be submitted to a future Meeting on the options available for re-prioritisation and targeting of resources.

12. Irvine: Woodlands Primary School

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the requirement for the transfer of land from the Community and Recreational Services Directorate and of the associated costs of this transfer in connection with the replacement of Woodlands Primary School, Irvine.

In September 1996, the Committee agreed that following a fire at Woodlands Primary School, the damaged classrooms be replaced and the remainder of the school replaced as and when capital resources permitted. During the design and planning process for the replacement of the remainder of the school, it has become evident that some additional land which is currently held in the Community and Recreational Services account will require to be utilised. In June 1997, the Community and Recreational Services Committee agreed to make the land available, but this will require the resiting of a training pitch and the relocation of some floodlighting at an estimated cost of £20,000.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that the costs of the resiting of the training pitch and relocation of floodlights of £20,000 be included in the Education Directorate bid for funding for the replacement of the remainder of Woodlands Primary School within the Capital Programme.

13. Irvine: Broomlands Primary School: HMI Inspection Report

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the HMI Report on Broomlands Primary School, Irvine.

The School was inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in May 1997 as part of a national sample of primary education. The report by HMI was published on 9 September 1997, identifying a number of strengths of the school and making some recommendations.

The key points for action cover (a) an increase in time allocated to environmental studies; (b) the extension of the structured activities programme to give more emphasis to problem solving; and (c) time being allocated for teachers to plan collaboratively.

Noted.

14. Early Intervention Programme: Progress Report

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the progress made in the implementation of the Early Intervention Programme in North Ayrshire.

The Nursery Nurses and Staff Tutor have been appointed, meetings have been held with all Head Teachers, Teachers and Nursery Nurses involved in the Programme to discuss the various aspects of implementation and a staff development programme has been drawn up. A North Ayrshire conference to launch the Intervention Programme will be held on 29 September 1997 in the Greenwood Teachers Centre, with Brian Wilson MP giving the opening address and all Members of the Council will be invited to attend. The Early Intervention Programme Advisory Group Chaired by Councillor Highet will hold its first meeting on 2 October 1997.

Noted.

15. Improved Standards of Teaching

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed response to the SOEID on the removal of incompetent teachers.

A request has been received from the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department for comments on the proposal to introduce a framework within which authorities, as employers, could take prompt and effective action to remove incompetent teachers when essential.

It was emphasised to the Committee that the vast majority of teachers employed by the Council give excellent high quality service and it is anticipated that only a very small number of teachers would be affected by the procedures proposed.

The Council has a Code of Discipline for Teachers, with the teacher Trade Unions, which includes a right of appeal, in the case of dismissal, to the Support Services (Appeals) Sub-Committee and a number of investigative procedures to be adopted prior to initiating disciplinary action. It is considered that there should be an appropriate balance between allowing sufficient time for the investigative and disciplinary procedures to be followed and ensuring that there is not an inordinate delay in initiating disciplinary procedures, taking account of the effect which an incompetent teacher can have on a child's education.

In order to discipline a teacher on the grounds of incompetence, in the first instance competence would have to be defined and it is recommended that the Government should initiate action in consultation with other bodies as appropriate to develop benchmark statements of competence for teachers reflecting current best practice in teaching and emphasising the importance of pupil/teacher relationships within the classroom.

Support will also be required for teachers who are experiencing difficulties, with proper documentation on such support, in the event of progress not being made and disciplinary action being considered. There are also potential links between issues of incompetence and appraisal. Whilst appraisal would normally be separate from the disciplinary process and seen as a positive step to develop teachers' skills, there may occasionally be situations where action being taken on incompetence will coincide with an appraisal and will have to be addressed as part of the appraisal.

With regard to the role of the General Teaching Council, it is considered that the GTC should have no part in the dismissal of incompetent teachers and that the employer should have the final say.

After a full discussion, it was agreed (a) that the proposals as detailed within the report be submitted to the SOEID as the Council's response, with an addition to include taking into account situations where teachers are suffering from ill health and stress and may request early retiral; and (b) that a report on appraisal procedures be submitted following the issue of the Government consultation document on this matter.

16. Children Educated at Home

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the current position in North Ayrshire regarding the arrangements for children who are educated at home.

On 3 December 1996, the Committee agreed the procedures for monitoring the arrangements made for children who are educated at home and that regular reports be submitted detailing by area the numbers and ages of the children.

The numbers of children being educated at home at present are as follows:-

<u>AREA</u>	<u>NO. OF CHILDREN</u>	<u>AGE</u>
Irvine	3	10, 7, 4
Kilwinning, Dreghorn and	0	

Springside		
Garnock Valley	1	15
Three Towns	4	11, 10, 8, 6
North Coast and Arran	2	11, 9

Noted.

17. Gaelic Education

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed response to the SOEID consultation on the development of Gaelic education.

The Scottish Education and Industry Department is undertaking a consultation exercise on proposals for the development of Gaelic education, covering Gaelic-medium subject teaching in secondary schools, pre-school provision; and a possible duty on local authorities to provide Gaelic-medium education, whereby the whole curriculum would be provided in Gaelic.

Within North Ayrshire there is no demand from parents to provide Gaelic subject teaching, there are no teachers currently able to provide Gaelic and the training proposals for secondary school teachers detailed in the consultation document for up to 50 days per participant would create considerable disruption and difficulties in providing cover. The Community and Recreational Services Directorate do, however, provide Adult Education classes in learning the Gaelic language. With regard to pre-school provision, there are no Gaelic-medium playgroups in North Ayrshire although there may be some interest in setting up such a group in Arran. Due to the staffing difficulties and lack of demand, it is proposed that the Council responds that there should be no statutory duty on local authorities to provide Gaelic-medium education. If this was to be approved, however, the criteria should be amended to state that "Gaelic-medium education should be provided where the parents of at least 8 children so request, providing that the children come from families where Gaelic is spoken in the household".

The Committee agreed to approve the terms of the response to the SOEID.

18. Kilwinning: Abbey Primary School: Extension Phase 1

Submitted report by the Architectural Services Manager on the tenders received for the Extension Phase 1 to Abbey Primary School, Kilwinning.

The redevelopments required at the school are in two sections, viz. (1) the replacement of the temporary classrooms located at the front of the school; and (2) internal alterations to the existing school in respect of the library, office, janitor, visiting services and staff accommodation. The total budget provision in the Capital Programme for these redevelopments is £510,000 over financial years 1997/98 and 1998/99. Following receipt of tenders, the lowest offer from John Moulds (Kilmarnock) Limited amounts to £558,749.30, exclusive of fees and furniture. It is proposed therefore that negotiations be undertaken with John Moulds (Kilmarnock) Limited on the basis of omission of Section 2 works amounting to approximately £97,000 and a number of minor amendments to specification to achieve savings of approximately £15,000. The successful conclusion of such negotiations would bring the costs down to within the current budget provision. Further provision of approximately £120,000 would, however, have to be made in a future Capital Programme to complete Section 2 of the development.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to authorise the Architectural Services Manager to (i) negotiate with John Moulds (Kilmarnock) Limited in the terms detailed; and (ii) accept the revised tender subject to the cost not exceeding the approved budget; (b) that the Director of Education submits a bid for Section 2 of the development and for nursery accommodation at the school in a future Capital Programme.

The Meeting ended at 3.50 p.m.