

Education Executive
17 November 2009

IRVINE, 17 November 2009 - At a Meeting of the Education Executive of North Ayrshire Council at 1.00 p.m.

Present

John Bell, Tom Barr, Reverend David Karoon, Gordon McConnell, Margaret McDougall, Peter McNamara, David O'Neill, and Gordon Smith.

In Attendance

E. Murray, Chief Executive; C. Kirk, Corporate Director, M. Docherty, Head of Service and F. Rodman, Quality Improvement Officer (Educational Services); D. Nibloe, Chief Accountant (Finance); J. Montgomery, General Manager, P. Shiach, Committee Services Officer and J. Stevenson, Communications Officer (Chief Executive's Service).

Chair

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Very Reverend Canon Matthew McManus and John Reid.

1. John Scott

A minute's silence was observed as a mark of respect following the death of Mr John Scott, the former Church of Scotland representative to the Education Executive.

2. Appointment of Church of Scotland Representative to the Education Executive

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on the Church of Scotland's nominee to the Education Executive.

Following the resignation of the Church of Scotland's previous representative to the Education Executive, the late Mr John Scott, a nomination was sought from the Church to fill the resultant vacancy. At a subsequent meeting of its Education Committee, the Church agreed to nominate Mr Gordon McConnell as its representative.

The Education Executive agreed that Gordon McConnell be accepted as the Church of Scotland's representative.

3. Proposed Increase in Nursery Session from Two and a Half Hours to Three Hours in August 2010

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the potential costs and challenges of increasing the nursery sessions from two and a half hours to three hours in August 2010.

Currently children are entitled to a nursery place the term after their third birthday and can access 475 hours of free nursery provision per annum usually for two and a half hours, five days per week for 38 weeks. Nursery provision in North Ayrshire can be accessed through either one of the 42 local authority nursery establishments or in one of 25 private or voluntary partner provider establishments, dependant on parental choice and availability. As part of the pre-school expansion, the Concordat states that from August 2010, local authorities should increase nursery sessions from two and a half to three hours per day.

Nursery staff work a 35 hour week, which allows 10 hours per week 'non contact' time to carry out other necessary duties which ensure the provision of a quality education for young children. These duties include planning for children's learning, completing appropriate assessment records, preparation and collection of resources and preparing the playroom for the next session.

Consultation has taken place with nursery heads, management and staff and with other local authorities regarding a proposed increase in the duration of nursery sessions from two and a half to three hours per day as required by the Concordat between the Scottish Government and local authorities. Details of the challenges raised were contained within the report.

The Education Executive was informed that increasing the provision to three hours would have financial implications and operational difficulties and may be detrimental to the quality of education being provided. The report proposed that North Ayrshire Council continues to provide two and half hour nursery sessions to children between the ages of three and five years.

The report further indicated that the Council was committed to the principles of early intervention through the implementation of the Early Years Strategy which targets support to the most vulnerable and seeks to support parents of young children. The community nurseries and the Family Connections project at Springvale Nursery have been highlighted as national examples of excellent practice.

The Corporate Director (Educational Services) advised the Education Executive that there were indications from within the Scottish Government that secondary legislation may be introduced to increase nursery education to 570 hours, which would have a significant effect on the Council's ability to both provide the additional hours and implement the Early Years Strategy.

Members raised concerns in relation to the timetable for the introduction of secondary legislation, which was currently unknown.

The Education Executive agreed to (a) note the report at this time; (b) receive a further report at the next meeting on the possible introduction of secondary legislation; and (c) seek the support of local MSPs in raising concerns with the Scottish Government over the potential introduction of secondary legislation.

4. Educational Services Property Portfolio: Schoolhouses on Arran

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the current status of the schoolhouses on the Island of Arran and on proposals for the future management of these schoolhouses.

There are currently seven schoolhouses on Arran which fall under the Educational Services property portfolio. These are let to teachers employed on the island. Due to changes in legislation regarding local authority housing, each of the current tenants has the right to a Scottish Secure Tenancy which effectively gives the tenant the right to buy after five years occupancy in the house.

In addition, as the houses are considered local authority housing, the Council will require to upgrade the properties to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015.

Of the seven houses in question, two are within the curtilage of a school and are an integral part of the school building. The remainder stand alone in their own grounds.

There are no contractual conditions of service in the teachers' contracts relating to the occupancy of the schoolhouses. The schoolhouses are not treated as Council houses under the Infrastructure and Design Services repairs and maintenance programme and therefore, any major repairs require to be funded by Educational Services. It is unlikely that any of the houses, in their current state, would meet the aforementioned Standards by the required date.

The current market value of the houses, as estimated by the Council's Estates Section, ranges from £210,000 to £335,000 per house. The report proposed that consideration be given to selling the available houses in their current condition. This proposal would not apply to the schoolhouses at Brodick and Corrie that are physically attached to the school building.

The proposed sale could be achieved by either being offered to the current tenant where one exists or sale on the open market. The realised income from the sale of the properties could be used to purchase alternative accommodation of a suitable nature that could be used as short-term accommodation for any new teachers on the island. Teachers taking up tenancy of any new accommodation would have an appropriate condition of service in their contract setting out the timescale for occupancy, typically limited to a period of two or three years.

Members requested and received clarification on issues in relation to upgrading the houses and adding additional conditions to teachers contracts.

The Education Executive agreed (a) to authorise the sale of the five free standing houses by the most appropriate manner; and (b) that the Corporate Director (Educational Services) identify alternative housing accommodation to provide limited support for new teachers moving to the island.

5. Citizenship and Participation of Young People

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on progress being made in promoting citizenship and participation of young people.

In December 2007, a report was presented to the Education Executive highlighting work undertaken in North Ayrshire in relation to consulting and involving children and young people. Following this, considerable activity has been undertaken in promoting citizenship and participation in schools and across Education Services more generally.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12.1) applies where children and young people are involved in decisions being made about themselves. Various agencies have taken on board the need to consult but this has resulted in an ad hoc approach to consultation. The establishment of North Ayrshire Youth Council with its Executive Committee, the creation of a Youth Citizenship and Participation Structure, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, provides the opportunity for a more strategic approach to consultation.

North Ayrshire Youth Council has representation from a variety of young people's groups including representation from nine secondary schools, young parents, and young people with disabilities. From the membership of the Youth Group there is an elected group recognised as the Youth Council Executive Committee which acts as a steering group and sets the agenda for the Youth Council. All schools in North Ayrshire have active Pupil Councils. A pilot programme is being developed by St Matthews Academy and Community Learning and Development Youth Services staff to provide a good practice framework for Pupil Councils.

There is an Annual Youth Conference with over 80 delegates in attendance representing all secondary schools together with youth groups across the authority. The Education Executive was advised of the intention to host a Youth Conference at St Matthews Academy - "Bridging the Gap" on 23 November 2009.

The report indicated that further work is required to ensure that the Pupil Councils provide all children with the opportunity of becoming "responsible citizens" and "effective contributors". In addition, a Primary Question Time event has been organised annually since March 2005 and provides an opportunity for participating pupils to ask questions of a panel of decision makers.

The Education Executive agreed to (a) the setting up of a strategy group with links to Integrated Children's Services and the Youth Council; and (b) receive a draft strategy for approval by January 2010.

6. Implementing the Gender Equality Duty Across Educational Services

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on progress being made in the implementation of the Gender Equality Duty and the need for Elected Members to be proactive in ensuring that gender equality is promoted across Educational Services.

The Gender Equality Duty, which came into force in April 2007, has major implications for education authorities and for schools and other education establishments. Education Services published a Gender Equalities Scheme which became incorporated into the Council's Gender Equality Scheme, details of which were contained in Appendix A to the report.

An Equalities Working Group with representation from a variety of educational establishments was set up as a vehicle for the delivery of gender equality and other equality issues.

The report indicated that most schools provided an impressive list of areas of strength in implementing the Gender Equality Duty including personal and social education programmes, the inclusive ethos of the schools, a focus on the needs of individual children and giving both boys and girls responsibility for looking after younger children. The report also provided details in relation to attainment, impact on learners, mainstreaming and the involvement of parents and young people.

The report proposed the following:-

- The authority provides further training on gender equality and shares existing good practice across all schools;
- Steps are taken to involve parent councils in the implementation of the Gender Equality Duty;
- Gender equality is mainstreamed into all aspects of the work of Educational Services as part of the service improvement agenda;
- A plan is drawn up to deliver equality impact assessments of all relevant policies and services within an agreed timescale; and
- The next report will focus on implementation of Gender Equality Duty in early years as well as primary and secondary schools.

The Education Executive agreed to (a) approve the proposals for action to continue to implement the Gender Equality Duty; and (b) receive a further progress report in November 2010.

The Meeting ended at 1.40 p.m.