

Education Executive
28 February 2012

IRVINE, 28 February 2012 - At a Meeting of the Education Executive of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

John Bell, Tom Barr, Alex Gallagher, Peter McNamara, David O'Neill, and Gordon Smith.

In Attendance

C. Kirk (Corporate Director), M. Armstrong, Head of Service (Logistics and Infrastructure), M. Docherty, Head of Service (Education 3-18), and F. Rodman, Quality Improvement Officer (Education and Skills); C. McCourt, Finance Manager (Finance and Infrastructure); J. Montgomery, General Manager, M. McKeown, Committee Services Manager and K. Dyson, Communications Officer (Chief Executive's Service).

Also In Attendance

M.R. Martin, Head Teacher, L. Fairlie, Depute Head Teacher, R. Morrison and L. Knox, pupil representatives, Ardrossan Academy.

Chair

Councillor McNamara in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Canon McManus and John Reid.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest by Members in terms of Standing Order 16.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Education Executive held on 17 January 2012 were signed in accordance with paragraph 7(1) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

3. Ardrossan: Ardrossan Academy Improvement Plan

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Education & Skills) on arrangements for sustaining and improving the quality of education in Ardrossan Academy.

Ardrossan Academy was inspected by HMIE in early 2006 and a positive report was published in May 2006. A further follow-through report published in April 2008 noted the improved capacity for improvement under the effective leadership of the then new headteacher. Appendix 1 to the report outlined some key facts about Ardrossan Academy. The School Improvement Plan, a copy of which was also appended to the report, outlines four priorities i.e.

- Improving Performance
- Curriculum for Excellence
- Developing Partnerships
- Cluster Working.

The Pupil representatives presented the Education Executive with information about life within the School from their perspective. The presentation outlined the way in which pupils engaged with the school. Thereafter the Head Teacher and Depute Head Teacher presented information on the School's approach to delivering on the Improvement Plan to improve performance within the school and deliver results for pupils.

Members asked questions in relation to the information presented, including:-

- the impact of staff turnover on the school;
- the use of tracking reports to parents and feedback from parents thereon;
- the importance of parents in supporting the school in driving pupils to improved performance;
- problems associated with identifying sufficient numbers of supply teachers;
- the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence within the school.

The Education Executive noted the efforts made by Ardrossan Academy to improve the quality of education.

4. Supporting Small Schools in North Ayrshire: Shared Headship: Gateside and Beith Primary Schools

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Education & Skills) seeking approval for the creation of a permanent shared headship between Gateside and Beith Primary Schools.

In August 2010, the Education Executive approved a report recommending shared Leadership arrangements for small schools as and when opportunities arose.

Since February 2011, a shared headship arrangement has been piloted between Gateside and Beith Primary Schools. Both schools serve the communities of Beith, Gateside and Barrmill. The shared headship arrangement has worked well and has enabled a joint approach to community engagement and has contributed to greater community cohesion. The report outlined the factors that have contributed to the success of the arrangement, and the benefits arising for staff, pupils and parents.

The Education Executive agreed to approve as permanent the management arrangements for a shared headship between Gateside and Beith Primary Schools.

5. The Management of Malicious Damage in North Ayrshire Schools

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Education & Skills) on the outcome of a review of the management of malicious damage to school premises.

In 2010/11, North Ayrshire Council undertook an internal audit of the processes and procedures which existed to manage the Education PPP Project which had been established for around 4 years at the time of the audit. Following completion of the audit, two recommendations were made within the report which related directly to the future management of malicious damage across the whole school estate, including the PPP and non-PPP establishments i.e.

- That Education & Skills should consider devolving the management of malicious damage in schools, along with associated budgets, to individual headteachers, to promote greater ownership and accountability for the actions of the pupils and to minimise the risk of escalating vandalism costs.
- That the Council should consider developing a policy in relation to dealing with malicious damage in schools.

Following the publication of the report, the matter was discussed at the Scrutiny Committee meetings of 15 August and 12 September 2011. A Working Group was thereafter established under the Chairmanship of the Head of Service (Infrastructure and Logistics) to examine these issues in greater depth.

The report summarised the different approaches to the classification and subsequent management of “malicious damage” within the Council’s PPP and non-PPP schools, and provided information in relation to the costs of treating incidents of malicious damage or vandalism within North Ayrshire Council schools. The conclusions of the Working Group were summarised as follows:-

- It is not possible to compare directly the recorded costs of malicious damage within PPP schools with non-PPP schools;
- The standards of maintenance being achieved, and hence what is recorded and actioned as malicious damage, are different within PPP and non-PPP schools;
- PPP schools differentiate between core hours and non-core hours, non-PPP schools do not. PPP schools also differentiate between accidental and malicious damage to property, non-PPP schools do not;
- There is no pattern to historical expenditure on malicious damage within individual schools that would enable any accurate forecast of predicted future expenditure at an individual school level. Such a projection would be required to facilitate the devolvement of budget responsibility to individual schools and headteachers;
- A considerable number of malicious damage incidents that occur within non-PPP schools are perpetuated when the schools are closed and cannot be directly attributed to the actions of school pupils;
- The capacity of school staff to reduce such incidents is therefore questionable; and
- Recent investment in school property will assist in deterring and reducing malicious damage.

Enquiries made to other Local Authorities show that a number have informal procedures in place to attempt to secure reimbursement for malicious damage. When asked how successful these informal arrangements were, no Authority could provide empirical evidence, and indeed, anecdotally, it appeared that the successes were of a limited nature. Discussions with Strathclyde Police have clarified that where there is a sufficient 'burden of proof', individuals could be charged from the age of 8 years old for acts of malicious damage to school property.

The Education Executive agreed (a) to note the conclusions of the Working Group into the management of malicious damage in schools; (b) that the centralised management and budgetary responsibility for malicious damage in schools should be retained; (c) to approve the change in management practice which will provide all head teachers with monthly reports detailing any incidents of malicious damage within their school, and a monthly service wide report to the Head of Logistics and Infrastructure; (d) approve action at an individual school level to raise awareness amongst pupils, parents and the wider community of the costs incurred as a result of malicious damage to school property; and (e) that in instances where the culprit(s) are known and sufficient proof is available, that arrangements should be put in place to ensure that the culprit(s) accept responsibility for their actions and are involved in restorative activities.

6. Cross Boundary Nursery Places

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Education & Skills) on changes to cross boundary nursery places.

Previous guidance from the Scottish Government indicated that eligible children aged 3-5 should be able to access their 12.5 hours of free nursery education in the nursery of their choice if a place was available, including cross boundary places. The recommendation was that this should be by way of a reciprocal agreement avoiding any need for charging between authorities. This meant that parents living in one authority and working in a neighbouring authority could access free nursery education in the most convenient nursery.

In the last two years, due to the current financial climate, some authorities have chosen to make changes to these arrangements by introducing a policy of charging for out of authority places. This policy could have an adverse effect on some of the families living in North Ayrshire who access a nursery place in another authority for work or childcare reasons.

The current position in North Ayrshire is that the Council accepts children in its Partner Nurseries who are living in other authorities and no charge is made to either the authority or the parent. Partner Nurseries receive £1625 funding for each fully loaded nursery place (475 hours).

In session 2011/2012 parents living in North Ayrshire who wished to send children to nurseries in Renfrewshire due to work commitments were told that they would have to pay for the place or seek funding from their local authority. As an interim agreement, North Ayrshire provided funding for the 6 children who were affected by this change.

From August 2012, South Ayrshire Council will also adopt a policy of charging for children from other authorities. Last session, 9 children from North Ayrshire attended partner nurseries in South Ayrshire. 27 children from North Ayrshire also attended nurseries in other authority areas. Last session 2011/2012, 13 children from other authorities attended North Ayrshire partner nurseries and no charges were made. No quality assurance was carried out on nurseries in other authorities by North Ayrshire Staff.

The report proposed that for session 2012/13, funding should follow the child. If a parent in North Ayrshire wishes to attend a nursery in another authority for valid work or childcare reasons then the funding will be paid to the partner nursery in the other authority. Funding will be paid directly to the provider in the same payment pattern as applies to North Ayrshire Partner Nurseries and will be paid at the same rate as that paid to North Ayrshire Partner Providers i.e. £1625. If the receiving nursery charges at a higher rate, parents will be required to pay the top up. Quality assurance will require to be carried out by the charging authority and they should inform North Ayrshire of any concerns about the provision.

Parents from authorities outwith North Ayrshire who wish their children to access nursery provision in North Ayrshire will fall into one of two categories i.e.

Category 1

Parents who live in authorities that continue to have a reciprocal arrangement with North Ayrshire will be able to access nursery education in North Ayrshire in the usual way.

Category 2

Parents who live in authorities that no longer adhere to the reciprocal arrangement with North Ayrshire will require to access their nursery funding from the authority in which they live.

The financial, practical and qualitative implications of the interim proposal will be evaluated at the end of February 2013 and a final decision made regarding a North Ayrshire cross boundary charging policy.

Members discussed whether or not there was any scope for raising the issue at a national level e.g. through COSLA to agree a formal, nationally agreed policy.

The Education Executive agreed (a) to note the changes in funding arrangements for cross boundary places; (b) approve the interim proposal; and (c) that discussions continue to take place with neighbouring authorities with regard to possible collective arrangements.

7. Additional Investment in ICT to Support the Raising of Attainment

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Education & Skills) on the additional investment in ICT which has been undertaken in 2011/12 to support the raising of attainment.

Previously, ring-fenced funding through the National Priorities Action Fund (NPAF) supported investment in ICT infrastructure and development within Education and Skills, enabling the delivery of well equipped and supported schools and educational establishments across North Ayrshire. In recent years, however, following the cessation of this ring-fenced funding, it has not been financially viable to sustain this level of annual investment. At the same time improvements in the capabilities and opportunities for ICT to support learning, raising of attainment and individual and community capacity building have continued to grow and develop. As a consequence, North Ayrshire's schools and learning services' ICT infrastructure has not managed to keep as abreast with ICT developments as the Council would wish.

The Executive, at its meetings held on 22 November 2011 and 31 January 2012, agreed a total additional investment in 2011/12 of £637k to be targeted at ICT to support the raising of attainment across Education and Skills. This 'pump-priming' investment has been complemented by a decision, taken as part of the Council's 2012/13 budget process, to establish an annual Education and Skills ICT investment fund of £150k. To maximise the benefits of economies of scale from procurement, central Education and Skills budgets and individual school devolved resources have topped up the additional investment agreed.

The report provided details of how the additional investment has been targeted in 2011/12 to provide new equipment within Community and Culture Services and within North Ayrshire schools. Members discussed the benefits that the increased investment would bring.

The Education Executive agreed to note (a) the additional investment that has taken place across Education and Skills services; and (b) that officers will continue to monitor the ICT investment needs of Education and Skills services in order to ensure that the infrastructure etc is as fit for purpose as possible.

8. Member/Officer Working Group on Raising Attainment: Minutes of Meeting held on 14 December 2011

Submitted report on the Minutes of the Meeting of the Member/Officer Working Group on Raising Attainment held on 14 December 2011.

Noted.

The Meeting ended at 3.50 p.m.

Signed in terms of Paragraph 7 (1) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.
Signed By:
Date: