

Education Executive  
17 February 2009

**IRVINE, 17 February 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, Margaret McDougall, Very Reverend Matthew Canon McManus, Peter McNamara, David O'Neill, John Reid and John Scott.

**In Attendance**

I. Snodgrass, Chief Executive; C. Kirk, Corporate Director, J. Leckie, M. Docherty and J. Ward, Heads of Service (Educational Services); and P. Shiach, Committee Services Officer and A. Wattie, Communications Officer (Chief Executive's).

**Also In Attendance**

E. Allan, Headteacher, St. Matthew's Academy.

**Chair**

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

**1. School Attendance and Attendance Councils**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on improving attendance in schools and on a proposed review of Attendance Councils.

The Council has introduced a number of measures which have resulted in overall improved attendance at schools within North Ayrshire. The replacement of the former attendance officers with pupil welfare officers, the introduction of the post of home school inclusion workers, and the development of an automated call system for contacting parents of secondary pupils when they are absent from school, have all helped to raise levels of school attendance.

The Scottish Government's publication "Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools 2007/08" indicated that primary school attendance in North Ayrshire had averaged 94.8%, which, for the first time, was slightly below the national average. The average attendance for secondary schools in North Ayrshire, registered at 90.7%, was also slightly below the national average but is, however, the Council's highest average attendance on record. Attendance in North Ayrshire across all sectors has continued to show steady improvement since 2005/06.

Since reorganisation, Attendance Councils have reviewed cases of chronic non-attendance. Membership was largely drawn from School Boards. The demise of the Attendance Councils, due to the transition from School Boards to Parent Councils, provides an opportunity to review procedures for dealing with this issue.

Traditionally, schools have had two referral routes for children with poor attendance, the Children's Reporter and the Attendance Council. Referrals to the Reporter tended to be for children and young people not attending school despite the best efforts of their parents, whereas Attendance Councils were viewed as the route to the prosecution of parents failing to ensure their children attended school. This has led to a considerable overlap between the two referral routes, and has resulted in Attendance Councils being unable to recommend prosecution due to care and welfare issues, and an inconsistency in record keeping in schools.

It is therefore proposed that a short life Working Group be set up to review the procedures for dealing with chronic non-attendance and the mechanisms for recording the required information, with a view to referring complex attendance cases to the appropriate early intervention, multi-agency Partnership Forum for each sector and locality.

In response to questions in relation to the role of the Partnership Forums, the short-life Working Group and prosecutions, the Education Executive was advised that the Forums would be involved in a review of the referral system, and investigations into the reasons for non-attendance. The short life Working Group would consist of headteachers and school staff and it was anticipated that a report on the findings of the Group would be submitted to the June meeting of the Education Executive. In relation to prosecutions, it was indicated that there had been difficulties previously in pursuing this course of action, and emphasis was being placed on supporting parents to fulfil their legal obligations in relation to their children's attendance.

The Education Executive agreed (a) that a short-life Working Group be established to review procedures for addressing chronic non-attendance; (b) to receive a report on the Working Group's review at a future meeting, and (c) that chronic non-attendance at school be included on the remit of the emerging local Partnership Forums.

## **2. Saltcoats: St Matthew's Academy: Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) Report**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the HMIE Report on St Matthew's Academy, Saltcoats.

St Matthew's Academy was inspected by HMIE in October and November 2008 as part of a national sample of secondary education. HM Inspectors evaluated how well young people learn and achieve, the impact of self-evaluation in improving learning, the quality of relationships, and leadership of the school. The evaluations of the school contribute to the achievement of targets within the Single Outcome Agreement.

The Report by HM Inspectors was published on 13 January 2009. It highlighted the strengths within the school such as the overall quality of pastoral care and the effectiveness of the school's approaches to supporting young people, the use made of external agencies to support learners' experiences, the commitment of staff, young people and parents and the leadership of the Headteacher and the school's Senior Management Team. The report also outlined areas requiring attention including the need to continue to improve the curriculum, to build on the good practice in learning and teaching to ensure it is spread across the school and to continue to improve arrangements for evaluating the quality of learning and teaching and monitoring the progress of the pupils.

In consultation with the designated Quality Improvement Officer and staff, the Headteacher has incorporated the recommendations of the HMIE into the School Improvement Plan and has discussed the proposals with staff, the Parent Council and the Pupil Council.

The Headteacher, Mr Allan, in response to questions on the nature of the Inspection, advised that the Inspectors had been impressed with the standards achieved within the school in the short time since its inception in 2007.

The Education Executive (a) congratulated the Headteacher on the positive outcome of the Inspection; (b) agreed to approve the proposals made to address the key points for action arising from the HMIE Inspection Report; and (c) noted the arrangements for follow-through.

### **3. Educational Services Property Portfolio**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the extent of property portfolio under the management of Educational Services and seeking agreement to a review of the future uses of the properties.

Educational Services manages 938 properties within the ownership of the Council, comprising 234 operational properties such as schools, libraries, museums and community centres (including the leisure facilities leased to North Ayrshire Leisure Limited), 238 operational areas of land and 466 non-operational buildings and areas of land. The non-operational properties relate to castle ruins, harbour walls, fields (some of which are leased for grazings), footpaths and shopping malls, and shops (leased to businesses).

In recent years, a number of steps have been taken to rationalise the estate and reviews have resulted in the closure, transfer or lease of some properties and a sharing of accommodation. It was proposed that further investigation be carried out on the uses of and needs for the property holdings of Educational Services and that a Review Group be established to consider the possibilities and to report on proposals for rationalisation of the property estate, together with a framework plan for future developments.

The Education Executive (a) noted the extent of the Educational Services' property portfolio; (b) remitted to the Chief Executive and the Corporate Director (Educational Services) to establish a Member/Officer Review Group to review the property portfolio, and (c) agreed to receive a report on the outcome of the review at a future meeting.

#### **4. 16+ Learning Choices**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on progress in implementing a 16+ Learning Choices pathfinder in secondary schools and proposals to extend the programme across North Ayrshire.

At its meeting on 19 August 2008, the Education Executive agreed to the implementation of a 16+ Learning Choices pathfinder in Auchenharvie Academy, Stevenston and in Irvine Royal Academy. The initial phase focused on ensuring that all winter leavers in both schools were offered an appropriate post-16 learning opportunity in advance of them leaving school.

The offer of post-16 learning in North Ayrshire consists of:-

- full or part-time education in school, FE college or HE;
- national training programmes (Get Ready for Work, Skillseekers, Modern Apprenticeships);
- locally recognised good quality training and jobs without training;
- informal learning, including personal and social development opportunities; and
- volunteering.

In addition to the national training programmes available to the 74 winter leavers in December 2008, Cunninghame Housing Association offered a two-year Chartered Institute of Housing accredited training programme in housing related services. Educational Services Community Learning and Development Service also offered a 12 week informal learning programme involving personal and social development opportunities and vocational learning for those winter leavers who were not ready to make the transition from school to post education, training, or employment.

Details of the support afforded to young people under this initiative were contained within the report. In response to questions on the Single Outcome Agreement and on the capacity in the system to expand to all schools, the Education Executive was advised that the desired outcome would be to increase the number of school leavers moving into positive post school destinations. In addition, resources would be relocated as necessary to ensure that all school leavers were given appropriate support.

The Education Executive agreed to (a) note the progress to date in implementing the pathfinder; (b) extend the 16+ Learning Choices initiative to all school leavers with effect from August 2009; and (c) receive further progress reports at future meetings.

## **5. School Leaver Destinations Return 2007/08**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the annual School Leaver Destinations Return (SLDR) 2007/08.

Increasing the proportion of young people moving to a positive and sustained post-school destination is a key priority for the Scottish Government and for the Council, as set out in the Single Outcome Agreement.

The SLDR is based on a follow-up of young people who leave school between 1 August and 31 July each year, the exercise is carried out during the month of September and the report is issued annually in December. The Scottish Government uses the data on the destinations of leavers to report against the National Indicator while local authorities use the data to inform initiatives developed as part of the More Choices More Chances Strategy to evidence success, measure progress and identify areas to target resource to improve post-school outcomes for young people.

The categories used by the Scottish Government to record the destinations of school leavers are:-

- higher education
- further education
- employment
- training
- voluntary work
- unemployed and seeking
- unemployed and not seeking and
- not known

The first five of the listed categories are classified as positive and the last three as negative post-school destinations.

In North Ayrshire, 85.9% of school leavers are in a positive destination, an increase of 1.3% on last year, full details of which were provided in the appendix to the report.

The Education Executive (a) noted the content of the report; and (b) agreed to (i) approve the targeting of support and resources to improve outcomes for young people; and (ii) receive an annual report on school leaver destinations.

## **6. Provision of Advanced Higher Courses**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on proposals for the delivery of Advanced Higher courses in secondary schools.

Secondary Schools in North Ayrshire offer Advanced Higher courses in certain subjects to 6th year students who have already gained a Higher in that subject. Most of the students have applied for entry to university and some gain unconditional acceptance in the course of the academic year.

The level of demand for particular subjects varies and secondary schools may not always have viable numbers to offer particular subjects. Class sizes of less than five pupils are usually not viable. The Council has provided transport to enable individual students to take Advanced Higher course in neighbouring schools, however, this is a costly solution (£20,000 in 2008/09) and can be disruptive to school timetables.

In response to requests from headteachers, Educational Services set up a short life Working Group to review Advanced Higher provision across North Ayrshire and to make recommendations for a strategic solution to meeting the needs of the students at a time of contracting budgets. The group recommends that:-

- studying at Advanced Higher level provides an important preparatory step in the transition from school to university;
- secondary schools should focus on the delivery of core subjects, with relatively high levels of participation;
- secondary schools should guarantee that students undertaking Advanced Higher courses in the core subjects would have a minimum of two periods of timetabled teacher contact;
- the Council should commission suitable experienced teachers to adapt a variety of learning and teaching resources to digital format for use in a Virtual learning Environment at an initial cost of £12,000, and
- access be provided to these digital resources via the website of the Educational Resource Service.

The Education Executive agreed to approve the plan for an alternative approach to the delivery of Advanced Higher courses across all secondary schools in North Ayrshire, as outlined in the report.

## **7. Extra In-Service Days for Curriculum for Excellence Implementation**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on proposals for additional in-service days to assist in the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence.

On 7 January 2009, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning announced, that in line with a recommendation from the Curriculum for Excellence Management Board, provision should be made for one extra in-service day in the current school year and one in each of the next two school years. This will allow time to focus on the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence.

In order to maximise the gain of the extra in-service day and minimise any inconvenience for parents and pupils, the options for the extra in-service day in North Ayrshire in the current school year are: -

- 30 April 2009
- 5 May 2009
- 4 June 2009

The Education Executive agreed that (a) the Corporate Director (Educational Services) apply for dispensation in order to close schools for an extra in-service day in the current school year and a further day for each of the next two school years; and (b) consultation take place with the Parent Councils and Professional Associations on the options outlined in the report.

## **8. Homecoming Year - Request for St Andrew's Day Public Holiday**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on a letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning seeking inviting the Council to consider, in terms of the St Andrew's Holiday Day (Scotland) Act 2007 designating St Andrew's Day as a school holiday as part of the Year of Homecoming.

The Education Executive agreed that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning be advised of the Council's decision that no action be taken in relation to the request.

## **9. The Provision of Education Services to Children with Additional Support Needs and Requiring Placement External to the Resources of North Ayrshire Council**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on a proposal to enter into a series of Framework Agreements for the provision of education services to children and young people with additional support needs who require to be placed outwith the resources of the Council.

Framework Agreements are increasingly being used across other local authorities and are considered to represent best value. The proposed Framework Agreements, as outlined in the report, would ensure that the services are advertised in compliance with recent European Procurement legislation, provide Educational Services with the flexibility to commission services on shorter term contracts and ensure that services are provided under the Council's terms and conditions.

The Education Executive agreed to authorise the Corporate Director (Educational Services) to invite tenders from suitably experienced and competent service providers, using the Open Tender procedure in conformity with European Union procurement legislation, Scottish Government procurement guidance and the Council's Standing Orders for Contracts.

The meeting ended at 2.30 p.m.