

Education Executive
23 June 2009

IRVINE, 23 June 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, Peter McNamara and David O'Neill and Gordon Smith.

Also Present

I. Snodgrass, Chief Executive; E. Murray, Chief Executive Designate; C. Kirk, Corporate Director; B. Gardner, Head of Educational Resources; M. Docherty, Head of Service (Educational Services); J. Montgomery, General Manager; Jill Stevenson, Communications Officer and P. Shiach, Committee Services Officer (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Bell in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Very Reverend Matthew Canon McManus, John Reid and John Scott.

1. Results of the Consultation on the Proposed Site for the Refurbishment or Replacement of Dreghorn Primary School

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the views expressed in the consultation on the proposed site for the refurbishment or replacement of Dreghorn Primary School.

At its meeting on 31 March 2009, the Education Executive agreed to the issue to all interested parties of a consultation document on the future location of Dreghorn Primary School. The Council had previously agreed to the replacement or refurbishment of the school and £9.3m has been allocated within the Council's capital plan.

The proposals required a formal consultation procedure in terms of the Educational (Publication and Consultation etc) (Scotland) Regulations 1981, as amended 1987, 1988, 1989 and the Education (Publication and Consultation etc) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2007. The consultation period extended to 52 days during the period 8 April to 29 May 2009.

The consultative document, a copy of which was appended to the report, was issued to:-

- all parents/carers of children attending Dreghorn primary school and nursery;
- headteacher and all staff of the school;
- the Parent Councils;
- the local elected Members;
- libraries;
- schools;
- Educational Services offices in Cunninghame House; and
- other interested parties, including the local MP and Sportscotland.

In addition, a meeting took place with the parents of children attending the school and the Parent Council at Dreghorn Primary School.

The consultation offered 4 options for consideration:-

- Option A - Refurbish the existing school building(s);
- Option B - Build a new school at the existing school site with the possible demolition of the old school;
- Option C - Build a new school at the Greenwood Academy and Greenwood Resource Centre site, and
- Option D - Build a new school at Dundonald Road, Dreghorn.

Fifteen written responses and emails were received as indicated in appendix 2 to the report. Overall, of the responses received, 14 supported Option D, with 1 supporting either Option B or C but against Option D. No support was indicated in respect of Option A.

The conclusion of the consultation exercise indicates that the responses favour Option D, the replacement of Dreghorn Primary School at Dundonald Road, as the preferred option.

In response to a question in relation to traffic problems at Greenwood Academy, the Education Executive was advised that these concerns would be addressed as part of the ongoing traffic management programme. In response to a question in relation to timescales, the Education Executive was advised that the anticipated completion date of the project was October 2012. Members sought further clarification in relation to:-

- walking routes to school;
- the potential upgrading of the local playingfield; and
- the school's relationship with neighbours.

The Education Executive agreed to approve Option D, the replacement of Dreghorn Primary School, as indicated in the report.

2. Eco-schools Programme

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on progress made by schools in regard to the Eco-schools Programme.

The Eco-schools programme is an internationally recognised, accredited programme which provides the opportunity to make environmental and global issues an intrinsic part of school life. The aims of the programme are to:-

- increase pupil knowledge and understanding of local and global environmental issues
- help develop decision-making skills in young people
- secure improvement across the nine areas of the Eco-school programme, namely:-
 - Litter
 - Waste Minimisation
 - Water
 - Energy
 - Biodiversity
 - Health and Wellbeing
 - School Grounds
 - Transport and
 - Sustaining our World

and

- make financial savings, e.g. energy savings, recycling, etc

The programme comprises three levels i.e. Bronze and Silver awards which are self-assessed, and the top award of the Green Flag which is externally assessed following submission of a Green Flag application to Eco-schools Scotland. Once awarded, the Green Flag must be renewed every 2 years and a school is considered to be a permanent Eco-school upon receipt of a fourth Green Flag.

All schools within North Ayrshire are registered Eco-schools. To date, 58 have achieved Bronze awards, 47 Silver, 18 Green Flags, 8 second Green Flags and 2 have received a third Green Flag. Details of the activities undertaken within schools were detailed in the report.

Members asked questions and sought clarification on:-

- the potential to introduce wind turbines in schools (and other Council facilities) on a cost effective basis, and
- how the take-up of Green Flag Awards might be increased in secondary schools

The Education Executive noted the position and agreed to receive further reports on future progress.

3. School Bus Contracts

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the provision of seatbelts on vehicles used for school transport and the estimated budget required to implement such a provision.

The 1980 Education Act and its subsequent amendments requires local authorities to assist parents with transporting their children to school in certain circumstances. The minimum requirements for children under the age of 8 years old and children over 8 years old in relation to transport were detailed in the report.

In relation to vehicles used for school transport, the normal Road Traffic Regulations apply. Buses or coaches over 7.5 tons and which travel at more than 60 miles per hour, require to be fitted with seatbelts. Vehicles that do not meet these standards do not require seatbelts to be fitted.

In terms of walking distances, North Ayrshire Council operates a minimum standard of 1 mile, for all children of primary school age, and 3 miles for children of secondary school age.

The provision of school transport in North Ayrshire is managed by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) as agent for the Council. The SPT tenders for school transport on a rolling programme with approximately one-third of the transport needs being renewed each year. A variety of vehicles are used, most of which are of an age and specification not requiring the provision of seatbelts. Others, mostly newer vehicles, are now fitted with seatbelts, provided by the operators at no additional cost to the Council.

Of the 11 local authorities within the SPT area, 4 provide mandatory seatbelt provision. While the use of seatbelts on dedicated school contracts is not a legal requirement, representation has been made, largely from the Garnock Valley, for consideration to be given to the introduction of seatbelts. The SPT has indicated that in cases where seatbelts have been adopted, difficulties have been encountered in relation to their use and abuse.

Tenders for school transport to Garnock Academy have recently been received by SPT. These contracts were tendered for 5 years with options for standard conditions of contract (no seatbelts required) and with the provision of seatbelts. Details of costs in relation to these contracts were contained within the report.

The report provided details on 4 options available to the Council and recommended Option 1 as the favoured option which would maintain the current position of requiring operators to meet the statutory requirement for bus operations. Seatbelts would only be provided if the vehicle required them or the operator chose to provide them.

Members stressed the need for seatbelts to be implemented on an equitable basis across North Ayrshire and for further research to be conducted in this area

The Education Executive agreed to (a) implement option 1 in relation to the current renewal of contracts; (b) research and consult more widely on the matter; (c) plan for a phased introduction to be developed and the financial implications raised as a future budget pressure, and (d) renegotiate contracts, if necessary, should a policy with regard to compulsory seatbelt use be introduced.

4. Consultation on the Future Status of The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS)

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) seeking authorisation to submit a response to the Scottish Government on behalf of North Ayrshire Council on the future status of The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS).

The Education Executive agreed to approve the consultation response attached as appendix 1 to the report, subject to the addition of potential representatives from Young Scot or the Scottish Youth Parliament to the composition of the Independent Council referred to in Chapter 3 of the response, for submission to the Scottish Government.

5. The Schools Estate - Additional Resources

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on additional resources allocated by the Scottish Government from the Scottish Futures Trust for investment in new school buildings to be allocated from financial year 2010/11 onwards.

The Scottish Futures Trust has been set up by the Scottish Government to deliver vital infrastructure projects. The SFT will develop the expertise and investment models for a range of public projects including new schools. The sum of £800m is being made available to local authorities in the form of a capital grant that will support a new school build programme of £1.25 billion. This would allow local authorities to replace around 55 schools across Scotland that are in the worst condition.

The £800m provided from the Trust would be used to fund two-thirds of the cost of the building of the secondary schools and a half of the cost of building the primary schools. Local authorities would be required to fund one-third of the cost of building a new secondary school and one-half of the cost of building a new primary school.

The funding will be directed to schools with a condition rating of C or D and details of the North Ayrshire School Condition/Suitability Rating 2009 were provided in appendix 1 to the report.

There are no schools within North Ayrshire with a condition rating of D, however, the schools that have been allocated a condition rating of C were detailed in the report.

The first tranche of funding will be directed to the primary school estate in financial year 2010/11, with funding for secondaries being available the following year.

The Education Executive agreed to (a) note the allocation of £800m to Scottish Local Authorities; (b) receive additional information on the processes for the allocation of funds as and when it is issued; and (c) write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, and the local MSP, Kenneth Gibson, expressing the Council's interest in accessing these funds.

The meeting ended at 1.55 p.m.