

Educational Services Committee
18 February 2003

IRVINE, 18 February 2003 - At a Meeting of the Educational Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Peter McNamara, Jacqueline Browne, John Reid, Thomas Barr, John Bell, Gordon Clarkson, Ian Clarkson, David Gallagher, Jane Gorman, James Jennings, Father Matthew McManus, Rev. Sandy Montgomerie, David Munn, David O'Neill, Samuel Taylor and Christine Welch.

In Attendance

B. Devine, Chief Executive; J. Travers, Corporate Director, J. Tulips, J. Ward, and L. Owens, Heads of Service (Educational Services); P. Doak, Finance Manager (Finance); M. Adams and M. McKeown, Corporate & Democratic Support Officers and A. Wattie, Communications Officer (Chief Executive's)

Also In Attendance

Frank Keddilty, Chief Executive (North Ayrshire Leisure).

Chair

Councillor McNamara in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Alan Hill, Tracey McPherson and Richard Wilkinson.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 7 January 2003, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. North Ayrshire Leisure Limited: Business Plan 2003/04

Councillors Barr and Reid declared an interest in the following item of business and took no part in the discussion thereon.

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on North Ayrshire Leisure Limited's Business Plan for 2003/2004, and on the associated level of financial support from the Council.

In terms of the Service Level Agreement between the Council and North Ayrshire Leisure Limited, the leisure company is required to prepare and submit a Business Plan for approval by the Council on an annual basis. The Business Plan for 2003/2004 was appended to the report. Mr Keddilty, the Chief Executive of the leisure company, highlighted the progress made by the company to date in delivering sport and leisure services in North Ayrshire, and outlined the company's key business priorities for 2003/2004.

There was discussion of the company's Balance Sheet and on swimming pool water temperatures. Mr Keddlity undertook to provide further details on the company's accounts and to make available guidelines on the water temperatures of swimming pools.

The Committee agreed to (a) approve North Ayrshire Leisure Limited's Business Plan as set out in the report; and (b) provide financial support of £3,919,516 to the company in financial year 2003/04.

3. Religious Observance in Schools

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on a proposed Council response to the Scottish Executive's consultation on religious observance in schools.

In 1991 the Scottish Executive issued Circular No 6/91 which provided advice on religious observance in schools. This Circular maintained that religious observance complements religious education and is an important contribution to pupil's spiritual development. It advised that religious observance in non-denominational schools should be of a broadly Christian character but that, where appropriate, schools may wish to organise special acts of observance for particular religions. All pupils should take part in religious observance not less than once a week in primary, and at least once a month and preferably with greater frequency in secondary schools. The Circular recognises the valuable contribution to school life which can be made by the active participation of a chaplain or team of chaplains.

The Executive established a Review Group on Religious Observance and has issued a consultation paper seeking the views of interested parties. The consultation paper, and accompanying questionnaire, were issued to all schools in North Ayrshire and discussed at meetings of Head Teachers. A number of Advisers and Head Teachers also attended consultation events. Feedback from respondents to the consultation paper was set out in the report. This indicated continued support for religious observance in schools in North Ayrshire, with a particular request from respondents for more help from school chaplains and local clergy in leading occasions of worship.

The Committee agreed that the Corporate Director (Educational Services) respond to the Scottish Executive in the terms indicated in the report.

4. Flexibility in the Curriculum

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on current and planned developments to implement flexibility in the curriculum within North Ayrshire schools, as promoted by Scottish Executive Circular 3/2001.

Since publication of this circular, which offered guidance on the range of flexibility available in the delivery of the curriculum, there have been national moves towards introducing greater curricular flexibility in S1-S6.

Most developments have been focused on introducing National Qualifications into S3 and S4 to replace Standard Grade, but there have also been some moves to introduce Standard Grade in S2 and S3 to address the issues of lack of pace and challenge in S2.

The terms of Circular 3/2001 were reported to the Committee in September 2001 when it was agreed that an Advisory Group be established to develop guidance on flexibility in the secondary curriculum. Guidelines were issued to all secondary and special schools in North Ayrshire in September 2002. These Guidelines require schools to (i) have in place strategies for implementing curricular change; and (ii) consult with parent/carers, staff and pupils on proposals for introducing greater flexibility in curricular provision.

The report highlighted the range of developments being taken forward in North Ayrshire schools to increase curricular flexibility, including initiatives being taken forward in partnership with local FE Colleges and Community Schools.

The Committee agreed to the current and planned developments to increase curricular flexibility in North Ayrshire schools, as set out in the report.

5. Arts and Cultural Events Programme 2003

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the proposed Arts and Cultural Events Programme for 2003.

The 2003 Programme of Events, as set out in the appendix to the report, has been drawn up by the Council's Arts and Cultural Services staff in consultation with local schools, community groups and, where appropriate, funding agencies.

Noted.

6. The People's Network

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on progress made in implementing a network of learning centres in North Ayrshire libraries as required by the 1997 publication entitled "The New Library: The People's Network".

In August 2001 the Educational Services Committee approved a strategy for the provision of learning centres across the authority. The Council has been allocated £332,132 for the period 2000/2003 from the New Opportunities Fund to implement the strategy, and the Library and Information Service is due to complete the People's Network in February 2003. All residents of North Ayrshire will have access to free computer and internet access in all 17 libraries, with a total of 120 computers with broadband connectivity being provided across the authority.

The Committee agreed to the implementation of the People's Network in North Ayrshire as set out in the report.

7. International Education in North Ayrshire Schools

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the current involvement of North Ayrshire Schools in international education projects.

North Ayrshire has developed a wide range of educational links and projects with schools and education authorities outwith the UK as a way of raising pupils' awareness of their own situation in relation to that of others, enabling them to acquire skills to make informed judgements, and to make them more employable, as well as ensuring that they develop informed attitudes and a willingness to participate in society. The report highlighted the current international projects ongoing in North Ayrshire Schools and the additional revenue generated by these projects for North Ayrshire schools.

The Committee agreed to the continued development of international education links with North Ayrshire schools.

8. Enterprise in Education

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the publication of "Determined to Succeed - a Review of Enterprise in Education" by the Scottish Executive Review Group, which reviewed the wide range of activities and programmes that are designed to prepare young people for the world of work.

The document sets out the Review Group's vision for Enterprise in Education and makes recommendations on how young people in schools, teachers, and business organisations can work together to prepare school leavers for the realities of the labour market.

A wide range of Enterprise in Education activities are already in place within North Ayrshire Schools, and these activities are broadly in line with the recommendations contained in the Review Group's report. It was proposed that these activities should continue pending the Scottish Executive's response to the Review Group's recommendations.

The Committee agreed to the continued development of Enterprise in Education in North Ayrshire schools as set out in the report.

9. Opera and Languages Pack

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the compilation and launch of the Opera and Languages Resource Pack.

The Scottish Executive Partners in Excellence initiative has assisted in promoting language learning in North Ayrshire and the other partner authorities. This has been done in a variety of ways including enhanced I.C.T. facilities, the use of video, and

student study visits to France, Germany and Spain.

North Ayrshire has a background in choral activity with many students continuing their studies within Higher Education. As students progress, competence in the languages in which operatic and other choral works are written is essential. Partners in Excellence has provided funding to secure the assistance of a professional opera singer in selecting operatic pieces both for a pack of resource materials and a performance for senior students of modern languages and music. The resource pack is designed to stimulate interest from senior students in opera in particular and the arts in general, whilst improving their modern language skills.

The Committee agreed to approve proposals to launch the resource pack at an event to be held in the Greenwood Teachers Centre, Irvine, on 25 February 2003.

10. HMIE Report: Arran High School

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the HMIE Report on Arran High School.

The Committee agreed to approve the proposals to address the key points for action in the HMIE report.

11. HMIE Report: Dalry Primary School

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the HMIE Report on Dalry Primary School.

The Committee agreed to approve the proposals to address the key points for action in the HMIE report.

12. HMIE Report: Brisbane Primary School

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the HMIE Report on Brisbane Primary School, Largs.

The Committee agreed to approve the proposals to address the key points for action in the HMIE report.

13. Revenue Budget 2002/03: Budgetary Control

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) on the budgetary control position for Educational Services at the end of December 2002 and projections for the financial year 2002/03.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 2.50 p.m.