

Audit and Scrutiny Committee
Tuesday, 09 January 2018

Present

Marie Burns, Joy Brahim, Alan Hill, Tom Marshall, Donald Reid and John Sweeney.

Also Present

John Bell, Robert Foster, Todd Ferguson, Alex Gallagher, Jean McClung, Davina McTiernan, Donald L Reid and Ian Murdoch.

In Attendance

E. Murray, Chief Executive, John Butcher, Executive Director (Education and Youth Employment); A. Fraser, Head of Democratic Services and A. Little Committee Services Officer (Chief Executive's).

Also In Attendance

Angela McCallum and Phil Lonsdale, Cumbrae Community Council.

Chair

Councillor Burns in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Margaret George.

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest by Members in terms of Standing Order 10 and Section 5 of the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

2 Call In: Reinstatement of School Transport for Cumbrae Pupils – Largs Ferry

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on a Call In Request received in respect of the decision taken by Cabinet at its meeting on 12 December 2017 in relation to the report on the Reinstatement of School Transport for Cumbrae Pupils - Largs Ferry Terminal to the New Largs Academy. A copy of the Cabinet report was provided at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Cabinet, at its meeting on 12 December 2017, considered a report on the transport arrangements of Cumbrae pupils travelling to Largs Academy. Currently the Cumbrae pupils are transported from Millport to Cumbrae ferry slipway and make their own way from the Largs ferry slipway to Largs Academy. The distance from the Largs ferry slipway to the new Largs Campus is one mile and is well within

the walking distance of three miles for secondary pupils, as outlined in Sections 51 (a) and 42 (4) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

The Cabinet agreed (a) to make no change to the current arrangements from Millport to Cumbrae Ferry slipway, but not to provide the transport arrangements for Cumbrae pupils from the Largs ferry slipway to the new Largs Academy; and (b) otherwise to note the terms of the report.

A briefing paper by the Executive Director (Education and Youth Employment) was circulated and provided information on the Council's current policy on (i) the Provision of School Transport, which is in line with Section 51 (a) of the Education (Scotland) Act; (ii) the current transport arrangements for pupils from Cumbrae; and (iii) the decision of Cabinet on 12 December 2017 not to reinstate the transport arrangements for Cumbrae pupils from the Largs ferry slipway to the new Largs Academy. The paper also outlined the on-going tender process for the school transport contract to Largs Academy, which includes an option to include prices for an unbroken journey from Cumbrae to the new campus.

A request was received in terms of the Call In procedure set out in the Council's Scheme of Administration and Standing Orders, that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee examine the decision taken by Cabinet.

The Call In Request, which was signed by Councillors Ferguson, Gallacher and Stephen, was in the following terms:-

Reason for Call In

There was a commitment made to ensure the safe transportation of Island children when the Junior Secondary School closed in the 70's ever since Cumbrae pupils have been transported by bus from Largs Ferry Terminal to Largs Academy.

The children live more than 3 miles in total from Largs Academy.

Island parents were promised this service would run when the new school opened.

Finally, Cabinet agreed on the same day to put children and young people at the heart of everything the Council does – I would argue that this is contradictory policy if there is no bus provision for the children and young people of Cumbrae.

Desired Outcome

I would like to see that the promises which have been made by the Council to the parents of Cumbrae are honoured and ensure that there is a bus provided from Largs ferry slip to the new Largs Academy when it is opened for the children and young people of Cumbrae.

The Head of Democratic Services summarised the procedure for considering the Call In Request and set out the circumstances surrounding the Cabinet decision.

Thereafter the Members who had requested the Call In were invited to speak. Councillor Ferguson expressed the view that the Cabinet's decision on 12 December 2017 reneged on a promise given to parents that the transport from the Largs ferry slipway to the new Largs Campus would be reinstated from April 2018. He considered the Cumbrae pupils' journey to school was unique in North Ayrshire in that it involved a walk, bus journey, ferry journey and a further walk to the school. He stated that no pupil on Cumbrae lives less than 3 miles from Largs Campus and Scottish Government legislation states that secondary pupils do not have to walk more than 3 miles between the school and a pupil's normal residence.

Councillor Murdoch as a local Member, addressed the Committee in support of the Call In. He displayed a video he had taken whilst travelling the route from Cumbrae to the new Largs campus. His journey started at the helipad in Cumbrae to the bus stop and involved a bus journey to the pier, a ferry journey to Largs slipway and a walk from the slipway to the construction gate entrance to the new academy. He highlighted that the walk from the slipway to the academy was not the safe walking route, but the quickest route available and that he arrived at the school entrance at 8.57 a.m. During winter months and inclement weather, parents on the mainland have the option to drive their children to school. This option is not available to the parents on Cumbrae and not only will the Cumbrae pupils arrive at school late each day, on occasions they will be soaking wet.

Angela McCallum and Phil Lonsdale, Cumbrae Community Council addressed the Committee in support of the Call In. They referred to the outcome of the consultation on the new Largs campus that school transport would be provided to Cumbrae pupils from the Largs slipway to the new campus from April 2018 and that this had been confirmed in a letter from the Executive Director (Education and Youth Employment) in September 2017. Parents on Cumbrae are concerned that without this transport their children will not be given equal education opportunities, as they will be late for school each day and also for exams which start at 9.00 a.m. Reference was made to the average weight of a school bag, which at 8 - 9 kilos (minus PE kit) could cause issues for children with medical conditions such as diabetes and asthma if a bus is not provided and they had to carry this from the slipway to the new campus. They referred to the Islands Bill which will include the preparation of an Islands Community Impact Assessment and guidance from the Child Law Centre that young people should travel for no more than 75 minutes in reasonable comfort. Cumbrae secondary pupils leave home early in the morning and return home after 5.00 p.m. and some pupils will have a total journey of 135 minutes each school day.

The Chair then invited Councillor Bell, as the Education portfolio holder to address the meeting. Councillor Bell clarified the decision that Cumbrae pupils would not be transported from Largs Ferry Slip to school had been taken 5 years ago. Accordingly, Cabinet had considered the issue of whether the extra distance to the new school required transport. However he accepted that the Cumbrae secondary pupils' situation and journey is not the same as that of mainland secondary pupils. It is now proposed that the on-going tender process for the school transport contract to Largs Academy, include prices for an unbroken journey from Cumbrae to the new campus. This is currently being assessed and will incur an additional cost to the Council. On that basis he agreed that Cabinet could reconsider its decision.

Councillor Hill, seconded by Councillor Marshall moved to accept the terms of the Call In. There being no amendment, the motion was carried.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to (a) note the on-going tender process for the school transport contract to Largs Academy, including prices for an unbroken journey from Cumbrae to the new Largs campus; and (b) recommend to Cabinet that transport for Cumbrae pupils from the Largs slipway to the new Largs campus is reinstated.

The meeting ended at 2.30 p.m.