

Education Committee
12 January 1999

Irvine, 12 January 1999 - At a Meeting of the Education Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Thomas Morris, Irene Oldfather, Margaret Highet, Thomas Barr, Stewart Dewar, John Donn, Stef Holmer, Father Matthew McManus, Alan Munro, Robert Rae, Evelyn Sillars, John Sillars, Gordon Smith and Reverend John Taylor.

In Attendance

J. Travers, Corporate Director, B. Gardner, Head of Education Resources, J. Tulips, J. Leckie, L. Owens and D. Anderson, Heads of Education Services (Educational Services); L. Morton, Assistant Principal Officer (Financial Services); M McCormick, Media Relations Officer and J. Bannatyne, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

Chair

Mr. Morris in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Patrick Browne, James Clements, Thomas Dickie, Samuel Gooding, Peter McNamara, David Munn, David O'Neill and George Steven.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 17 November 1998, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Excellence Fund for Schools

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on proposals for expenditure in relation to a Core Programme under the Government's Excellence Fund for Schools.

The Excellence Fund, which is divided into a Core Programme and a Special Programme, offers Education Authorities significant additional resources for expenditure in schools provided the resources are targeted for a specific range of activities. North Ayrshire Council has been allocated £2,338,813 towards the Core Programme and further information on the Special Programme will be issued in due course by the Scottish Office. The Core Programme proposals will cover alternatives to exclusion, study support, early intervention, supporting parents, classroom assistants, reducing class sizes, support for teachers, Higher Still and the National Grid for Learning, and detailed information on these matters was provided in the report together with details on the level of proposed expenditure to be allocated to each area of the Programme. It is anticipated that, subject to acceptance of the proposals by the Government, they will result in a significant input of additional resources to schools which will be of great value in raising standards and promoting social inclusion.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve the proposals in the terms outlined in the report; and (b) that a further report be submitted when the Scottish Office response has been received.

3. School Heating Plants

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) giving detailed information on the age, condition and costs of replacing the remaining coal fired school heating systems in primary, secondary and special schools within North Ayrshire. The report indicated that those schools whose heating systems require urgent attention, including the warm air system employed at Fencedyke Primary School, would require special attention when consideration is being given to the proposals for Capital Projects to be funded in 1999/2000. Account will be taken of this requirement within the proposals for the Education Capital Programme submission for 1999/2000. The total cost of conversion of the remaining coal fired plant in all North Ayrshire schools is in the region of £1,595,000.

Noted.

4. Education Capital Programme 1999/2000

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on proposals for the Education Capital Programme submission for 1999/2000.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the prioritised list of Capital Programme proposals for 1999/2000 in the terms indicated in the report; and (b) that the proposals for the Education Capital Programme submission for 1999/2000 be referred to the Corporate Strategy Committee for consideration.

5. Higher Still

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) outlining the current position on the implementation of the Higher Still Programme in Scottish Schools.

The local implementation programme anticipated the introduction of all the new Higher courses in 1999/2000 with a phased implementation of the other Higher Still levels thereafter. It is now anticipated, following discussions with Trade Unions and COSLA, that the implementation of the new Higher will be over two years.

A National Liaison Group has been established and has issued guidance to Local Authorities on how a revised phasing of implementation should be achieved. A North Ayrshire Liaison Group has also been established to consider the position on a school by school and subject by subject basis and will report on its conclusions to the National Liaison Group by 29 January 1999. National Staff Development Seminars for Principal Teachers have been held during November and December 1998 and Senior Management Teams in North Ayrshire Secondary Schools have completed a comprehensive review of current and future curriculum provision and timetabling structures from S1 to S6. The additional funding allocated to schools through the New Deal and further amounts issued in September 1998 have now been distributed.

Noted.

6. Education Provision in Kilwinning: St. Winning's and St. Luke's Primary Schools

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the outcome of a consultation on a proposed amendment to the catchment areas of St. Luke's and St. Winning's Primary Schools which was previously identified in a report to the Committee on 6 October 1999.

Copies of the consultation document were widely circulated and appropriate publicity given in the press. Written submissions were requested by 20 November 1998. One parent and Strathclyde Police submitted written submissions indicating that St. Winning's Primary School was their preferred option while the Head Teacher from St. Winning's Primary School expressed the view that the school roll would be disadvantaged by the lack of nursery provision within the school

and by the fact that further housing developments in Kilwinning are located within St. Luke's catchment area.

The Committee agreed that the catchment area in question be adjusted so that the children in the area be zoned to St. Winning's Primary School with effect from August 1999.

7. Education Provision in Kilwinning: Abbey and Whitehirst Park Primary Schools

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the outcome of a consultation proposing amendments to the catchment areas of Abbey Primary School and Whitehirst Park Primary School, Kilwinning previously approved by the Committee on 6 October 1998.

The consultative document was widely circulated with appropriate publicity given in the press and written submissions were requested by 20 November 1998. The Whitehirst Park Primary School Board and Strathclyde Police supported the rezoning proposals while two parents expressed reservations and opted for the status quo. The Abbey Primary School Board agreed in principle but expressed some reservations. Taking into account the views expressed it was recommended that the catchment areas be amended as proposed.

The Committee agreed that (a) the Woodside area of Kilwinning be rezoned to Whitehirst Park Primary School; (b) children currently attending Abbey Primary School, who live in the Woodside area of Kilwinning, be given the option of transferring to Whitehirst Park Primary School where accommodation permits; and (c) these recommendations should take effect from the start of session 1999/2000.

8. Raising Standards: Setting Targets for 5-14 Attainment

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the further progress which has been made towards the setting of 5-14 targets in Primary and Secondary Schools including details of the programme of support planned to assist schools in raising attainment. Both Primary and Secondary Schools are already working on a range of strategies to improve performance and raise standards and comprehensive details were provided on both the national and North Ayrshire averages at June 1998 and on the aggregate North Ayrshire targets for June 2001. Target Setting Advisers have visited every school in North Ayrshire to discuss and advise on the setting of targets which are realistic and achievable and which take into account each school's current performance and the performance of similar schools. Achievement of the new targets set would indicate a substantial improvement in the standards attained by pupils in North Ayrshire.

Noted.

9. International Call Centre Training

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the outcome of an application to produce language training materials for use in international Call Centres under Strand 3l(a) of the Leonardo da Vinci programme which was submitted prior to the deadline of 31 March 1998.

The project application was approved by the European Union on 3 December 1998. The report gave details of the underlying aims of the project and of North Ayrshire's partners. Technical support on access to Call Centre staff have been agreed with the international Call Centre, IBM, Greenock. Under the Leonardo programme approximately £100,000 has been allocated to the project.

Noted.

10. European Dimensions: Links with Catalan Speaking Areas of Spain

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the developments of links with Catalan speaking Spain.

Given that Scotland and Catalan speaking Spain are considered to have a number of common interests, Spanish language teaching has been identified as a key part of linguistic diversification in North Ayrshire and a number of projects have subsequently been established in Primary and Secondary Schools in addition to a pilot initiative in Nursery Education. In association with a previously approved teacher exchange programme, officials from Govern Balear visited schools in various Scottish Authorities and the Scottish Office in Edinburgh. Discussions were also undertaken with Officers of the Council to identify joint bids for Comenius and other European projects. Information was also provided on exchange visits involving teachers from Scottish Local Authorities including North Ayrshire and from Spain. The Chair of the Education Committee has been invited to the inaugural visit. A number of bids for European funding are also being developed by Officers of North Ayrshire and Govern Balear which include management training, music, arts education and language teaching.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the proposals outlined in the report; and (b) that the invitation to the Chair to attend the inaugural visit be accepted.

11. New Community Schools

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the proposed submission of an application to the Scottish Office for support for two "New Community School" pilot projects within North Ayrshire.

The purpose of New Community Schools is to bring together under one roof a single team of professionals from school, education, social work, family support and health education and promotion services. The "New Community Schools Prospectus" issued in November last year by the Scottish Office invites Local Authorities to participate in an initiative intended to modernise schools, raise attainment and promote social inclusion. Information was provided on some of the essential characteristics of the proposed new community schools which have proved successful in the USA. The Scottish Office has requested the submission of applications for support for schemes in the first phase pilot programme by 5 February 1999.

Discussions have been held between officials from the Education and Social Services Directorates and representatives from Ayrshire and Arran Health Board, the Ayrshire and Arran Community Health Care Trust and Strathclyde Police who have all expressed a willingness to help develop the proposed scheme. It has been suggested that Irvine Royal Academy and Auchendarvie Academy, together with Primary Schools within their respective clusters, be put forward as the proposed pilots for North Ayrshire given their suitability in terms of local social problems, recognised indicators of disadvantage and experience in operating learning support etc.

Although in the main, the costs of service delivery are expected to be funded from existing Council budgets, grant aid from the Scottish Office towards each New Community School pilot project will be available for the next three years subject to a ceiling of £200,000 per year. This may be used for supporting the management structure necessary to provide for integration of services, staff development and training and consultation development and planning work. Any extensions to service delivery associated with the scheme may be funded only up to 50% of eligible costs. It is anticipated that in the event that the applications are successful Scottish Office grant aid will cover any additional revenue costs to the Council in 1999/2000.

The Committee agreed to (a) approve the submission of an application to the Scottish Office for support for two "New Community School" pilot projects; (b) approve the selection of the Irvine Royal Academy and Auchendarvie Academy school clusters as the location of the pilot projects; (c) authorise officers to liaise further with Social Services, Police and Health Authorities on the ongoing development of this initiative; and (d) approve the establishment of a steering group, should the proposal be successful, with representation from all interested parties and elected

members.

12. Reporting to Parents 5-14

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the introduction of a proposed standard format for reporting to parents on the progress of pupils in the 5-14 curriculum for use by all Primary Schools in North Ayrshire.

In 1996 the Council established a Review Group to look at the possibility of devising a common format for reporting to parents. Draft formats for this purpose were devised and extensive consultations undertaken involving all North Ayrshire schools, who responded in detail. Analysis of the responses indicated that Primary Schools were keen to adopt a computerised format for reporting which would require extensive staff development and some upgrading of computers and printers. Within the secondary sector common criteria have now been agreed for use in all schools and there will be a gradual move towards a common format for Secondary Schools. The proposed Primary School computerised format will be adapted by the special schools to suit their particular needs. A detailed example of the new proposed computerised format was provided in the report. A rolling programme of staff development courses has been set up to train teachers in the use of this format. The programme will take three years to complete. In the interim schools may use an alternative blank format to write their own statements on each pupil's progress. The format is also intended to help to establish the involvement of parents in their children's learning.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the North Ayrshire Council format for Reporting to Parents on pupils progress in the 5-14 curriculum; (b) that copies of the new format be issued to all Primary Schools for implementation; and (c) to approve the arrangements which have been put in place to support schools in the implementation of the computerised format of the report.

13. School Boards in Scottish Schools

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Educational Services) on the status of school boards in Scottish Schools set up under the School Boards (Scotland) Act, 1988 together with information on the relative position of North Ayrshire.

A total of 83% of eligible Education Authority schools had a school board in May 1998 as compared to 76% in May 1996. At May 1998 School Boards had been formed in 82% of primary, 97% of secondary and 61% of special Education Authority schools. North Ayrshire has 100% coverage with all 10 secondary, 52 primary and 4 special schools having School Boards and is one of only four Scottish Authorities having total representation.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 3.00 p.m.