

Education Committee
27 January 1998

Irvine, 27 January 1998 - 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, Patrick Browne, James Clements, Stewart Dewar, Thomas Dickie, John Donn, Stef Holmer, Peter McNamara, David Munn, Alan Munro, David O'Neill, Robert Rae, Evelyn Sillars and Reverend John Taylor.

In Attendance

The Director of Education, J. Leckie, J. Tulips and L. Owens, Heads of Education Services, N. Connaughton, Senior Adviser, J. Ward, Adviser (Education); D. Nibloe, Principal Officer, Accountancy (Financial Services); S. King, Corporate Policy Officer and J. Bannatyne, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

Chair

Mr. Morris in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Samuel Gooding, Father Matthew McManus, John Sillars, Gordon Smith and George Steven.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 2 December 1997, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Education Capital Programme

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals for the Education Capital Programme submission for 1998/99.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the prioritised list of capital programme proposals for 1998/99 in the terms indicated in the report; and (b) that the proposals for the Education Capital Programme submission for 1998/99 be referred to the Corporate Strategy Committee for consideration.

3. Public Education in Scotland into the Millennium

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the establishment of a joint enquiry by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the teachers' trade unions into public education in Scotland into the Millennium.

The enquiry will provide a rigorous examination of a number of relevant issues through written evidence from a wide range of partner organisations and individuals and to this end 4 Task Groups have been established with the following remits:-

- Group 1 - to consider
 - (i) the future financing of Local Authority education;

- (ii) the role of the Local Authority Education Department;
 - (iii) the impact of a Scottish Parliament on school education; and
 - (iv) the strategic direction of Local Authority education services;
 - Group 2 - to consider
 - (i) managing demographic pressures; and
 - (ii) matching needs and resources;
 - Group 3 - to consider management structures in schools; and
 - Group 4 - to consider enhancing the work and effectiveness of the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee (SJNC).
- Local Authorities had been asked to submit comments on aspects of the groups' respective remits and the report presented possible responses in relation to each.

The Committee agreed that these draft responses should constitute the Council's submission.

4. Musical Activities in North Ayrshire Schools

Submitted report by the Director of Education detailing the extensive range of musical activities and developments within schools in 1997 and presenting proposals for a musical programme in 1998.

The Committee agreed to approve the Programme for 1998.

5. Schools Mosaic Project

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a successful mosaic project undertaken by primary schools in the North Coast area in conjunction with Safeway Stores involving the creation of a wall mural for the new Safeway supermarket in Largs.

The Company financed the project and donated £500 to each participating school to be spent on an arts based activity.

Noted.

6. School Planning

Submitted report by the Director of Education on progress made in the implementation of school planning in schools and nurseries in North Ayrshire, following the introduction of an agreed format in November 1996, an extensive programme of staff development to provide support and guidance for Head Teachers and the production of guidelines to all establishments.

The implementation of school planning has been phased over two years and in year one, schools were required to submit their plan in the new format by May 1997 and during the course of 1997 each school received three visits from their designated adviser to assist in its preparation and a further visit to assist in self-evaluation by monitoring progress in its implementation. Following their requisite assessment, all schools have now received a letter from the Director of Education approving their plans.

Schools have generally welcomed the new school planning format and timetable and are now working on the current phase of implementation with plans for 1998/99 requiring to be submitted by the end of April 1998. HMI have also included favourable comments about the planning process within their reports on North Ayrshire schools inspected during 1997 and numerous educationists who have recently visited North Ayrshire from Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Germany and Malta have been impressed by this approach to quality assurance in schools.

Noted.

7. Provision for Pupils with Communication Disorders

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a proposal to issue a consultative document which (a) outlines the rationale for relocating the class unit for primary aged pupils with communication disorders from Stanecastle School, Irvine to Dreghorn Primary School from August 1998; (b) confirms the involvement of parents and schools boards of both schools and the parents of the 10 unit children affected within this formal process; and (c) explains the provision and arrangements which would be made to allow this transfer.

The Committee acknowledged the greater opportunities which this relocation would offer the children as regards integration with their mainstream peers and agreed that (i) full consultation be undertaken on this proposal; (ii) the Committee report be issued as a consultative document and made available to all interested parties including the relevant school boards; (iii) all interested parties be invited to make written representations on the proposals to the Director of Education, Cunninghame House, Irvine no later than 28 February 1998; and (iv) the Director of Education prepare a report on the results of the consultative process for consideration at a future meeting of the Education Committee.

8. Glengarnock Primary School: HMI Inspection Report

Submitted report by the Director of Education confirming the terms of an outstanding inspection report by HMI at Glengarnock Primary School in September 1997 as part of their national sample of primary education.

The main recommendations of the report, which also highlighted a number of strengths within the school, are that:-

- teachers should extend programmes in English language and mathematics to provide more opportunities for pupils to develop writing for a broader range of audiences and strategies for mental calculation and problem solving and enquiry.
- the school's aims and development plan should place more emphasis on improving standards of attainment.

It is proposed to address these key recommendations in the following manner:-

- Programmes in English language will be extended by planning opportunities for children to write for different audiences.
 - A system will be put in place for managing the development of strategies for problem solving at different stages of the school.
 - There will be a time allocation each day to carry forward mental calculation in each class.
 - Clear targets will be set within the school plan for improving attainment.
- Within two years after the publication of the Inspection Report HMI will make a follow up visit which will focus on the key recommendations in the Inspection report.

The Committee agreed (A) to approve the proposals to address the key points for action in the Inspection Report; and (B) that the Director of Education pass on the Committee's congratulations to the staff at Glengarnock Primary School on their high standards.

9. Provision for Primary Aged Hearing Impaired Pupils

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a proposal to issue a consultative document which (a) outlines the rationale for the creation of a unit for pupils with hearing impairment in Towerlands Primary School, Irvine for August 1998; (b) confirms the involvement of all interested parties including the parents of the children currently affected and the staff and school board of the school in the consultation process; and (c) explains the provision and arrangements which are required to allow this unit to be established.

The affected pupils currently attend West Park School in Crosshouse, East Ayrshire which is a primary school for hearing impaired children. Seven of the nine pupils on the current roll are from North Ayrshire. Whilst opportunities do exist at present to develop links with mainstream schools there is evidence to suggest that the children's interests are not best served by a segregated primary school and the projected numbers do not indicate a school of viable size.

In these circumstances the Committee agreed that (i) full consultation be undertaken on this proposal; (ii) the Committee report be issued as a consultative document and made available to all interested parties including the relevant school boards; (iii) all interested parties be invited to make written representations on the proposals to the Director of Education, Cunninghame House, Irvine no later than 28 February 1998; and (iv) the Director of Education prepare a report on the results of the consultative process for consideration at a future meeting of the Education Committee.

10. Attendance and Absence Statistics

Submitted report by the Director of Education on attendance and absence statistics for North Ayrshire schools for session 1996/97 which forms part of the annual report by HMI Inspector of Schools. These statistics not only allow information to be provided to parents but also assist school staff in deciding how to promote attendance and reduce absence.

The main features of the statistical analysis are that authorised and unauthorised absence, and levels of half day absences in North Ayrshire schools are all close to the national average in both primary and secondary schools, and that the three year trend in relation to attendance and absence statistics shows a fairly static situation at national, North Ayrshire and individual school levels.

Noted.

11. Arion Study Visit to North Ayrshire

Submitted report by the Director of Education on an Arion study visit to North Ayrshire from 8-13 March on the theme of Quality in Education which will involve 15 educationists from 8 European countries in a programme of school visits and presentations on the Council's Quality Assurance Policy.

Visits arranged through the Arion programme qualify for European funding and participants are responsible for their own travel and accommodation costs.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the arrangements for this visit; (b) to nominate the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Committee to meet the European visitors; and (c) to authorise a Convener's Reception at the close of the visit.

12. Triennial Review of Services for Children Under 8

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the procedures for conducting the Third Triennial Review of Childminding, Daycare and Education services for children under eight years of age as required by the Children Act, 1989.

Although the current exercise is the Third Triennial Review of Services it is the first to be

undertaken by North Ayrshire Council and thus provides opportunities to review and improve upon previous formats adopted. It is proposed that the content of the Review should remain broadly similar to the previous exercise which followed the Scottish Office Guidance of 1991.

The Director of Education will lead and co-ordinate the Review process consulting, where appropriate, with other Directorates of the Council.

The findings of the Review will then be presented to the Education Committee prior to the publication of the draft Review document in October 1998. Consultation will also be undertaken with elected members, Ayrshire and Arran Health Board and a range of organisations and interested groups.

The Committee agreed to approve these proposals contained in this report for conducting the Third Triennial Review of Services.

13. Environment Week 1998

Submitted report by the Director of Education providing details of a proposed programme of competitions and events to be organised by the Education Directorate during Environment Week 1998 which seeks to involve participation by the maximum number of schools and individual pupils and which is scheduled to include an environment debate; an art competition; the production of an eco warriors environment pack; a pupil conference; a tidy schools competition; and an invitation to pupils in primary, secondary and special schools to design a logo for environment week 1998.

The Committee agreed to approve these proposals.

14. Pre-5 Special Educational Needs Provision

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a proposal to develop new pre-5 provision for children with special educational needs.

Education Authorities have a duty under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 as amended by the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Act 1989 to identify children from the age of two who have or appear to have special educational needs. Details which were given on the current provision within North Ayrshire showed that whilst the Moor Community Nursery in Irvine offers a service to the Irvine/Kilwinning area no parallel provision currently exists in the Largs/Three Towns/Garnock Valley areas. In these areas the nearest equivalent provision has been provided by Parkhouse Special Needs Playgroup which is a voluntary group based in Ardrossan Civic Centre meeting three mornings per week and catering for around 10 children aged between one and four years.

It is considered that a dedicated special needs pre-5 unit requires to be developed for the north part of North Ayrshire to create a more acceptable balance of special needs provision. Suitable accommodation has been identified within Three Towns Community Nursery in Saltcoats and it would be possible in the first instance to establish a small unit for children aged between three and five at this location. This would allow Parkhouse Playgroup to continue to offer a service to the younger group of children aged three and under and/or additional sessions for those children offered places within Three Towns Community Nursery. It is proposed that steps be taken to establish a new unit to operate from August 1998.

The Committee agreed to approve these proposals.

15. Europe Week 1998

Submitted report by the Director of Education providing details on a number of events to be run by the Education Directorate within schools to celebrate Europe Week 1998 including a European Quiz, taster lessons in European languages and a debate for primary schools on a European issue.

While these events provide the basis of educational participation in Europe the Council spokesperson on European issues, Councillor Oldfather, is involved in discussions regarding further events at a European and national level and any additional activities will be reported in due course.

The Committee agreed to approve these proposals.

16. Educational Provision in Irvine

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the issue by the Council of a consultative document on a proposal to build a new primary school within the Lawthorn area of Irvine including proposed amendments to the delineated areas of Towerlands Primary School.

North Ayrshire Council previously agreed to the inclusion of a project within the Capital Programme to provide a new primary school in the Lawthorn area and a formal consultative document giving extensive details on the proposals for the provision of the new school and their implications had now been completed. Authority is now being sought to issue the consultative document to all interested parties in terms of the Education (Publication and Consultation Etc.) (Scotland) Regulations 1981.

The Committee agreed (a) to consult on the proposals contained within paragraph 3 of the consultative document; (b) that the report be issued as a consultative document and made available to all interested parties; (c) that all interested parties be invited to make written representations on the proposals to the Director of Education, Cunninghame House, Irvine no later than 27 March 1998; and (d) that the Director of Education prepare a report on the results of the consultative process for consideration at a future meeting of the Education Committee.

17. UK Net Year

Submitted report by the Director of Education on UK Net Year which is an initiative to promote information and communications technology (ICT) in schools and confirming proposals for the involvement of North Ayrshire schools.

The Committee agreed to approve these proposals.

18. Education in Early Childhood: The Pre-School Years: Response to Consultation Paper

Submitted report by the Director of Education presenting the terms of a response to "Education in early childhood: The Pre-School Years"

The consultation document states the Government's intention to give Local Authorities responsibility for the co-ordination of pre-school education in their areas. It seeks to focus debate on how the services should be planned and funded to ensure quality provision for all children in their pre-school year and eventually for children in the two pre-school years. The proposals suggest that funding will be in the form of a specific grant and Local Authorities will require to take a leading role in the planning and delivery of services. Collaboration amongst different providers is considered desirable and Local Authorities will also be encouraged to work in partnership with the voluntary and private sectors seeking their co-operation in the provision of services. Information was provided on current nursery provision in North Ayrshire where at present the Council provides part-time nursery education for all children in their pre-school year if requested to do so by parents.

The Committee agreed to approve the terms of the proposed response.

The Meeting ended at 3.15 p.m.