

Education Committee
17 September 1996

Irvine, 17 September 1996 - At a meeting of the Education Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Thomas Morris, Margaret Highet, Thomas Barr, Patrick Browne, James Clements, John Donn, Samuel Gooding, Stef Holmer, Father Matthew McManus, David Munn, Alan Munro, David O'Neill, Robert Rae, Evelyn Sillars, Gordon Smith and Reverend John Taylor.

In Attendance

The Director of Education; Brian Gardner, Head of Education Resources; Lesley Rowson, Jim Leckie and Jim Tulips, Heads of Education Services; David Nibloe, Principal Officer Accounting and Budgeting (Financial Services); David Anderson, Head of Cultural and Community Services (Community and Recreational Services); and Sandra Bale, Administration Officer (Chief Executive and Corporate Support Services).

Chair

Mr Morris in the Chair

Apologies for Absence

Irene Oldfather, Stewart Dewar, Thomas Dickie, Peter McNamara, John Sillars and George Steven.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minute of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 August 1996, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Glebe Primary School Irvine: Inspection Report

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the HMI Report on Glebe Primary School Irvine.

Glebe Primary School was inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) in May 1996 as part of a national sample of primary education. The report by HM Inspectors was published on 2 September 1996, identifying key strengths of the school and main points for action. In consultation with the Senior Adviser (Primary Education) and promoted staff, the Head Teacher will prepare a draft action plan which will address the recommendations of the report. Some of the main points for action are already being addressed, including reviewing arrangements for the boys' toilets and the safety of pupils from traffic at the school entrance. The Head Teacher and the Head of Education Service will meet with the School Board to discuss the final action plan, which is required to be submitted to HMI within four months of the publication of the report. A designated member of the Advisory Service will remain in contact with the school throughout the follow-up period to offer advice and support.

After discussion the Committee approved the proposals to address the key points for action in the HMI Inspection Report on Glebe Primary School, Irvine.

3. Outdoor Education

Submitted report by the Director of Education on outdoor education provision.

The national guidelines on Environmental Studies 5 to 14 identify the central role of outdoor education in the delivery of environmental studies in both primary and secondary schools. The current provision ranges from activities within the school and school grounds to external visits to facilities in North Ayrshire including the Arran Outdoor Education Resource, Brodick Castle Country Park, Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, Eglinton Country Park and the Maritime Museum in Irvine, all of which provide support for the 5 - 14 curriculum. Costs of such visits are met from within schools own budgets. Health and Safety regulations are of the utmost importance in outdoor education. With regard to the procedures for arranging outdoor education visits, the Director of Education advised that these would be looked at as part of the overall review programme.

The Committee (a) noted the current role of outdoor education in the curriculum; and (b) approved the current provision of outdoor education in North Ayrshire.

4. Arran Outdoor Education Resource

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed expansion and charges for the Arran Outdoor Education Resource.

Following local government reorganisation, due to closures of centres located in other council areas, the number of places available to young people at outdoor residential centres has declined. Approximately 37% of the expenditure and income associated previously with outdoor education provision in the former Strathclyde Regional Council Ayr Division was disaggregated to North Ayrshire Council. Under this arrangement it was anticipated that the Council would receive income from East and South Ayrshire Councils for pupils from their schools attending the Arran Outdoor Education Resource. Both Councils have, however, indicated that they will be developing their own in-house provision and will not require to make use of the provision on Arran.

In order to address the shortfall in available outdoor education places, it is proposed to increase the capacity of the Arran Outdoor Education Resource to twenty-four clients during weekdays and twelve clients at the weekend, thus effectively doubling the existing level of provision on Arran. The Resource has no residential accommodation of its own, with accommodation currently being provided by booking the appropriate number of places in the Whiting Bay Youth Hostel. In view of the proposed expansion of the Resource, it is also proposed to establish a formal accommodation arrangement with the Scottish Youth Hostel Association for provision of beds at the Whiting Bay Hostel.

Previously, school pupils were charged a reduced rate at the Arran Outdoor Education Resource and in certain instances, pupils from Areas of Priority Treatment were given a place at no cost, the cost being met from a subsidy within the outdoor education budget of up to 35% of the total cost. It is proposed to maintain this overall level of subsidy.

The Resource will be mainly used by North Ayrshire schools, with some use by the Community and Recreational Services Directorate, but if there is spare capacity it will be made available to external applicants. It is also proposed that all bookings are paid for in advance with the sum being non-returnable in the event of cancellation, although discretion will be used in exceptional circumstances.

After a full discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve the increase in the capacity of the Outdoor Education Resource to twenty-four clients during weekdays and twelve clients at the weekend; (b) to the employment of an additional Instructor and the increase in working hours by twelve per week of the Cook who is currently employed in the Youth Hostel; (c) to the purchase of appropriate sizes of wet weather clothing and boots for primary age children; (d) to the establishment of a formal accommodation arrangement with the Scottish Youth Hostel Association; (e) the funding of the proposed expansion of the Resource to be met from budgets previously used

but that proposal was unsuccessful.

After a full discussion, the Committee agreed to (a) approve the service level agreement between the Directorates of Education and Community and Recreational Services for the delivery for formal adult education; and (b) remit to the Corporate Strategy Committee to consider funding provision for repairs to the Focus Learning Centre, Saltcoats.

7. In-Service Training Course Programme

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed in-service training course programme for 1996/97.

A wide ranging programme of sixty eight in-service training courses has been compiled by the Advisory Service and issued to schools. These include at primary school level, the phased programme of support for the 5 to 14 programme involving aspects of environmental studies, expressive arts and religious and moral education; at secondary school level, all subject and other areas; at special school level, access being offered to all courses in the programme and specific activities for special schools; and at generic level, management issues, quality assurance systems etc.

The Committee approved the provision of the in-service training programme for 1996/97.

8. School Transport

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the provision of school transport for pupils who have been re-directed from their catchment area primary school.

On 6 August 1996, the Committee agreed to review the policy on the provision of school transport and in particular the situation regarding pupils re-directed from their catchment area school. A survey of all primary schools has indicated that only five had pupils re-directed during school session 1995/96 and a total of some twenty pupils were involved. The majority of these were able to be accommodated within their local primary school within the space of one session. Approximately five pupils are re-directed during their P7 year or have been re-directed at an earlier stage, but no place has become available in the interim. The majority of these pupils will transfer to the same secondary school, regardless of whether they remain re-directed or not. Approximately two pupils per annum, may either transfer to their local secondary school or to the secondary school associated with their re-directed primary. In the latter case they are ineligible for free school transport. In view of the small number of pupils in this situation, it is proposed that the existing policy be amended to allow free school transport in these circumstances. The cost is likely to range from £0.00 to £400.00 given the location of the schools concerned.

Arising from this, concerns were expressed over the issue of privilege bus passes from pupils travelling from Stevenston to St Andrew's Secondary School, Saltcoats. The background to the issue of privilege passes was explained and assurances given that the particular situation affecting the Stevenston pupils would be addressed shortly.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that (a) pupils who have been re-directed from their catchment area primary school and for whom a place has not become available by Primary 7 should be eligible for free school transport, in terms of the existing distance criteria, to the secondary school associated with the primary school which they attend; (b) the policy should be reviewed if the costs incurred substantially exceed the estimates given; and (c) a report be submitted to the Committee in June 1997 reviewing the number of pupils who have been re-directed and the implications in terms of school transport.

9. School Security

Submitted report by the Director of Education on progress in the review of school security arrangements.

On 20 February 1996, the Council agreed to allocated £120,000 for improvements to security in schools. Furthermore the Committee on 16 April 1996 agreed to establish a Review Group on school security. The Review Group has met to consider security issues facing schools and has also visited five schools. Various security measures have been considered and the advice of the Police has also been sought. The Group has now produced a number of proposals to limit access to school buildings including door locks, procedures for monitoring visitors to the building for which guidelines to schools will be issued, stopping up of rights of way, video surveillance and additional fencing, albeit that a considerable amount of fencing work has already been undertaken from school Health and Safety budget provision.

After discussion the Committee agreed (a) to approve the proposals for the allocation of the £120,000 Capital expenditure as follows:-

- (i) security access doors to primary, special and nursery schools, £85,000;
- (ii) pilot video surveillance at Abbey Nursery, Kilwinning and St Peter's Primary School, Ardrossan, £16,000;
- (iii) stopping up of the right of way of Kilwinning Academy, £13,000;
- (iv) promotion of security badges and visitor books, £4,000; and
- (v) additional fencing to school grounds, £2,000; and

(b) to remit to the Review Group to consider the fencing requirements of special schools and in particular the situation at Mayfield Primary School , Saltcoats, where the fencing undertaken there has been carried out in isolation, thus affecting James Reid School and the Focus Learning Centre.

10. Visit of Bingham String Quartet to Arran

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the visit of the Bingham String Quartet to Arran and proposed workshop event on 14 February 1997.

The Committee approved the proposed one-day workshop event by the Bingham String Quartet for schools on Arran on 14 February 1997.

11. School Admissions: Secondary School

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed issue of consultative documents concerning the creation of delineated areas for all secondary schools.

The Education Committee on 6 August 1996 agreed that the Director of Education should prepare consultative documents on the creation of delineated areas for all secondary schools. These documents have now been prepared for the ten secondary schools in North Ayrshire. The effect of creating a delineated area will be to give priority for admission to those children who live within that area. Children who attend an associated primary school through a successful placing request will in future require to make a further placing request to the secondary school, although the present school rolls are as such that all placing requests should be able to be accommodated. The consultative document will be issued to the School Boards of the secondary schools, along with the School Boards of the associated primary schools and in the case of a denominational school, the appropriate church representative. In the case of Largs Academy, as the proposal requires a change in the transfer arrangements for children attending Skelmorlie

Primary School, the consultation will take place with all parents of children who attend Skelmorlie Primary School, the School Board of Largs Academy, the School Boards of associated primary schools and Inverclyde Council.

It was noted that an amendment was required to the consultative document on Irvine Royal Academy, which should state that the roll projection indicates that the school will be able to provide places for all pupils from its associated primary schools and expected new housing until the year 2000. Assurances were given that roll projections of Irvine Royal Academy would be monitored carefully and other schools would be looked at in more depth to ascertain future requirements.

After discussion the Committee agreed (a) to the consultation arrangements on the creation of delineated areas for all secondary schools and the issue of the report on each school as a consultative document to the various interested parties; and (b) that the Director of Education submit to a future meeting a report on the results of the consultation process.

12. Policy Review Process

Submitted report by the Director of Education on progress in undertaking the reviews of policy previously agreed.

On 23 January 1996, the Education Committee agreed to initiate a phased programme of review of specific policies, with regular reports back to the Committee. A number of working groups involving senior management, head teachers, other staff and on certain issues, elected members have been set up to progress the various policy reviews. In response to a suggestion by a number of School Boards, it is proposed that a further Review Group be set up on school uniform and that it should include two members of School Boards to be nominated by the Parental Executive Committee of North Ayrshire School Boards Forum.

The Committee agreed to (a) approve the continuation of the phased programme of policy review; (b) establish a Review Group on school uniform; and (c) to nominate Mr Donn and Mr Browne to the Group.

13. Hundred Thousand Petition

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a request from the Scottish Parent Teachers Council to support the Hundred Thousand Petition on Education funding.

The petition urges the government to make Education one of their main priorities and provide adequate and sufficient funding. The Scottish Parent Teachers Council is seeking the support of all local authorities for the petition.

The Committee agreed to support the Hundred Thousand Petition.

14. The European Schools Project

Submitted report by the Director of Education on an invitation for North Ayrshire Council to join the European Schools Project and to become the co-ordinating authority for Scotland. The project is a support system involving schools across Europe, enabling them to communicate by electronic mail and providing opportunities for improvement and innovation in the ways in which they communicate and exchange curricular resources and research materials.

The Committee agreed that (a) the Council joins the European Schools Project; (b) the Council becomes the co-ordinating authority for Scotland; and (c) all schools in North Ayrshire be invited to participate.

15. Conference: Towards a National Strategy for Early Years Services

Submitted report by the Director of Education on an invitation to attend the Conference "Towards a National Strategy for Early Years Services" to be held in Edinburgh from 10 to 11 October 1996.

The Committee approved the attendance of the Chair at the Conference Towards a National Strategy for Early Years Services.

The meeting ended at 3.30 p.m.