

Education Committee
5 August 1997

Irvine, 5 August 1997 - 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, James Clements, Stewart Dewar, John Donn, Samuel Gooding, Father Matthew McManus, David Munn, Alan Munro, Robert Rae, George Steven and Reverend John Taylor.

In Attendance

Chief Executive, the Director of Education, B. Gardner, Head of Education Resources, J. Leckie, Head of Education Services, N. Connaughton, Senior Adviser, J. Ward, Adviser (Education), M. Marshall, Architectural Services Manager, A. Herbert, Head of Accountancy, (Financial Services), M. Pepper, Principal Marketing and Publicity Officer and S. Bale, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

Chair

Mr Morris in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Thomas Dickie, Stef Holmer, Peter McNamara, David O'Neill, Evelyn Sillars and John Sillars.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 3 June 1997, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Evaluation of Nursery Education Initiative: Final Report

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the Evaluation of the Nursery Education Initiative in North Ayrshire.

On 5 March 1996, the Committee agreed that detailed implementation plans for the Nursery Education Initiative be drawn up to include the establishment of an Evaluation Group to ensure rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the Initiative during the pilot year. The Evaluation Group has held regular meetings and undertaken research by means of a questionnaire, ongoing observation and interviews.

The final Evaluation Report has now been completed, covering the areas of patterns of provision; the experience of parents; the experience of providers; quality issues; and finance. The weaknesses of the voucher system have been identified including the bureaucracy and the difficulties of some families in accessing the vouchers. The financial analysis in the evaluation shows that the scheme does not take account of the real costs of introducing places for all children in their pre-school year and that the voucher value of £1,100.00 is inadequate in relation to a number of areas of provision.

It was noted that the absence of capital provision in the scheme had meant that it was not possible to create new provision in all areas, although it had been possible to plan expansion in some areas such as Castlepark. The pilot scheme has, however, created over 700 additional nursery places, one third in the voluntary sector and two thirds in the local authority sector, and

overall parents were highly satisfied with the nursery provision which they had selected. The report which concludes that the decision of the Council to enter into the pilot scheme has been amply justified will be forwarded to the National Evaluation Committee.

Noted.

3. Higher Still Development Programme

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the current position in relation to the Higher Still Development Programme and proposals for its future development.

The Government has announced a revised timetable for the implementation of the Higher Still Development Programme which will delay the commencement of all Higher Still courses until autumn 1999, with the Advanced Higher following in 2000. To assist in the national management of the programme, an Implementation Group has been established with wide representation including local authorities and trade unions. A national programme of staff development has been developed and during 1997/98 three Staff Development Programmes will be delivered at central locations across the country by National Trainers. All schools will be encouraged to send Principal Teachers to these Staff Development days. Within North Ayrshire, a Higher Still Co-ordinating Group has been established with representation from Head Teachers and the Advisory Services. To ensure that all teachers are provided with training to the same level as Principal Teachers the in-service day on 20 October 1997 will be devoted solely to Higher Still. Discussions are also planned with East and South Ayrshire Councils regarding the possibility of co-ordinating in-service days for session 1998/99 to allow the national Staff Development Programme to be delivered on an Ayrshire-wide basis.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the ongoing Higher Still Development programme for implementation; (b) to invite the Teachers' Side of the JCC to nominate a representative to the Higher Still Co-ordinating Group; and (c) that further reports be submitted on the progress of the implementation programme.

4. Partnership with Parents: Review Report

Submitted report by the Director of Education on progress in the Parent Partnership Initiative during 1996/97 and on steps to provide further feedback.

On 16 April 1996, the Committee approved a new structure of parental contacts to take forward the Parent Partnership Initiative in North Ayrshire following extensive consultation. The Committee further agreed that the effectiveness of the new arrangements be reviewed after they had been in operation for a school session.

The new arrangements have included (i) the establishment of a North Ayrshire School Boards Forum which meets bi-annually and to which elected members, school board members and parents are invited; (ii) the creation of three geographical clusters within North Ayrshire, holding bi-annual cluster meetings open to a similar audience to the Forum; (iii) the setting up of a Special School Cluster Group to be an additional annual event to allow dedicated attention to matters relevant to special schools; and (iv) the identification of seven members from the four clusters to form a Parental Executive Committee and from that group one member to become the parental representative on the Education Committee.

Meetings of the various groups as detailed above have been held during the year. Attendance has been varied and the closeness of the cluster and forum meetings may have produced a blurring of the purpose of each. Other initiatives which have taken place include the introduction of an Education Newsletter for all school boards and a seminar on school boards for elected members held in May 1997.

Whilst it is not considered that any radical alteration is required to the current arrangements, some further review is required and it is proposed that a short paper/questionnaire be issued to all school boards, elected members and the Parent Executive Committee, inviting comments and

suggestions on any revisions required.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the proposals for a wider evaluation exercise through the issuing of a briefing paper and questionnaire to all school boards, elected members and the Parent Executive Committee; and (b) that the Director of Education submit a further report once the evaluation exercise has been completed.

5. Early Intervention: Grants Programme

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the successful outcome of the application for grant to the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department.

On 3 June 1997, the Committee approved an application to the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department for funding from the Early Intervention Grants Programme to undertake a project of early intervention strategies in literacy and numeracy for pupils in primaries 1 and 2. The funding bid has been successful and the project can now be implemented.

Schools which will participate in the project have been identified using the level of footwear and clothing grants as the criteria for eligibility. Appropriate resources for the delivery of enhanced literacy and numeracy programmes will be provided to these schools and staff comprising 14 FTE nursery nurses, to support P1 teachers in the teaching of reading, writing and number, will be employed on temporary contracts along with a staff tutor and a research assistant. A Project Advisory Group will be set up to monitor and evaluate the Early Intervention Strategy.

A grant of up to £300,000 in each of the three financial years 1997/98, 1998/99 and 1999/2000 has been awarded and the financial implications to the Council are as reported to the Committee on 3 June 1997.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the plans for the implementation of the literacy and numeracy intervention strategy; (b) to refer the staffing proposals to the Support Services Committee for consideration; (c) to establish an Evaluation Group to monitor and evaluate the initiative; (d) to appoint Councillor Margaret Hightet to chair the Evaluation Group; and (e) that regular progress reports be submitted on the implementation of the strategy.

6. Reporting of Incidents of Violence

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a monitoring procedure introduced by the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department.

A circular has been received from the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department on reporting incidents of violence and requesting local authorities to establish procedures for reporting, recording and monitoring incidents of violence against school staff, including both teaching and non-teaching staff.

Within North Ayrshire, incidents of violence are rare. The introduction of a standard definition and national guidelines on procedures is, however, welcomed and it is proposed to review existing practice and draw up revised procedures in consultation with the teaching and non-teaching trade unions.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the development of procedures as detailed in the report; and (b) that an annual monitoring report be submitted on any incidents of violence arising in North Ayrshire schools.

7. Learning Support Network

Submitted report by the Director of Education on progress made in the restructuring of Learning Support provision in North Ayrshire.

On 28 January 1997, the Committee, approved a restructuring of Learning Support Provision for North Ayrshire schools, following an extensive consultation. The implementation of the restructuring has progressed, including the appointment of one of the three existing Network Co-ordinators to the new post of North Ayrshire Learning Support Network Co-ordinator; meetings have been held with all Head Teachers, network staff, psychologists and principal teachers of learning support to explain the new unitary structure and management arrangements; new North Ayrshire audit documentation has been designed to provide a sensitive and fair method of allocating support service; and a deployment plan for learning support staff for 1997/98 has been constructed on the basis of the audit returns.

The overall impact of the restructuring has resulted in a significant overall increase in the learning support network time for schools. Future developments will include the issue to all schools of a new Support for Learning contract and continuation of the training initiative.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the plans for deployment and development in 1997/98; and (b) that the Director of Education submit a full evaluation report at the end of the 1997/98 school session.

8. Educational Links with Europe

Submitted report by the Director of Education on recent developments in relation to links with schools in Europe.

Developments which have taken place include (i) the appointment of a Norwegian teacher to work in North Ayrshire from October 1997 until June 1998, who will be involved in various areas including project work on Norway, working on the European dimension and producing teaching materials; (ii) an exchange of primary teachers between North Ayrshire and Bordeaux; and (iii) a visit to Marburg in Germany at which a number of potential links with certain schools in North Ayrshire were identified.

Additionally, a seminar was held in Arran High School on 28 June 1997 to assist North Ayrshire schools in undertaking multi-lateral partnerships. Both Arran High School and St. Anthony's Primary, Saltcoats have been featured as case studies of good practice in the publication Thinking European, St. Anthony's in relation to its development of Spanish language classes and Arran High School for the development of electronic links with schools in Norway and France.

The Committee agreed to approve the further development of the educational links with Europe.

9. Gateside Primary School: HMI Inspection Report

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the HMI report on Gateside Primary School and proposals to address key points for action.

Gateside Primary school was inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in March 1997 as part of a national sample of primary education. The report by HMI was published on 24 June 1997, identifying a number of strengths of the school and making some recommendations.

The key points for action cover (a) improvements to the accommodation which are already being addressed in the Capital Programme; (b) opportunities being given to pupils for more extended and challenging writing tasks from P4 to P7; and (c) the need for the Head Teacher to monitor standards of pupils work and learning and teaching more systematically. In considering the overall findings the Committee congratulated the Head Teacher and staff on such an excellent report.

Noted.

10. Arts Developments in North Ayrshire Schools

Submitted report by the Director of Education on recent arts development in North Ayrshire schools and on future initiatives.

Recent developments in schools include (i) staff and pupils at Arran High school playing a leading role in Feis Arainn in June 1997; the production of a booklet of poetry by primary school children, which will be distributed to all schools this month; and the continuing success of the North Ayrshire Schools Choir and North Ayrshire Schools Concert Band who have been invited to perform at a number of venues.

Future developments include the implementation of three suggestions made by members in relation to Christmas 1997, viz the production of a recording by the North Ayrshire Schools' Choir and Concert Band; the production of a North Ayrshire Schools' Calendar; and the staging of "Carolling Christmas" in the Maritime Museum on 18 December 1997 which will involve all schools.

The Committee agreed to approve the proposals.

11. Vandalism in Schools

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the costs associated with, and measures to reduce, vandalism to school properties.

Within North Ayrshire, a number of schools, but not all, are subject to vandalism and it is estimated that in 1996/97 a total of £116,003 was spent on necessary repair work. A further £204,975 was spent on preventative measures within the most badly affected schools which included the provision of perimeter fencing, video surveillance, alarms, roof access protection, window and door shutters and these measures have proved successful in making substantial reductions in the level and costs of vandalism.

During this summer, Strathclyde Police as part of the Spotlight Initiative have also mounted additional patrols in an effort to target both vandalism and unsociable behaviour.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) that further reports be submitted on the levels of vandalism within schools; and (b) that local members be kept advised of any particular problem of vandalism to schools within their area in order that they may raise the issue with Strathclyde Police.

12. Policy Reviews: Progress Report

Submitted report by the Director of Education on progress to date in the Policy Review process.

On 5 March 1996, the Committee agreed that reviews of policy in various areas be initiated and that proposals for North Ayrshire Council policies in each of these areas should be submitted to the Committee in due course.

Details were given of the current position in relation to each of the established policy review groups.

Noted.

13. Transport for Children with Special Educational Needs

Following the Committee's decision on 3 June 1997 submitted report by the Director of Education providing details on contracts awarded following the re-tendering of three specific contracts to transport pupils with special educational needs to schools.

The report also confirmed that during the summer holiday period, the Psychological Services section undertook a number of assessments of children's needs and concluded that a further 15 contracts for transport of children with special educational needs was required. Arrangements have been made to receive tenders for these contracts and it is proposed to proceed to award these contracts to ensure transport provision for the start of the new session, with a report back to the Committee on the outcome in due course.

In addition, a request has been received from a parent to transport her own child, who has special educational needs, to school. It is proposed to pay the parent the current public transport rate for undertaking this duty which is in line with payments made by the other Ayrshire Councils.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the action taken to award of the three contracts which had had to be readvertised; (b) that the further 15 contracts should be awarded and reported to the Committee in due course; and (c) to approve the payment of the current public transport rate in cases where parents, with the agreement of the authority wish to transport their own children with special educational needs to school.

14. Beith: New Primary School

Submitted report by the Architectural Services Manager on tenders received for the new Beith Primary School which will on the basis of the lowest submission exceed the financial provision in the capital programme by £467,000.

The Architectural Services Manager provided an assurance that he would investigate the feasibility of making savings but considered it unlikely that any substantial reduction could be made in the contract's costs without reducing the size of the school.

The Committee (a) agreed in principle to authorise the Architectural Services Manager to accept the lowest tender of £2,949,484.20 submitted by John Dickie Construction Limited, Glasgow; and (b) to refer to the Corporate Strategy Committee consideration of the implications of the additional cost for the capital programme.

15. Irvine: Woodlands Primary School Extension

Submitted report by the Architectural Services Manager on tenders received for the extension to Woodlands Primary School, Irvine.

The Committee agreed to authorise the Architectural Services Manager to accept the lowest tender of £599,447.38 submitted by McTaggart Construction Limited, Dalry.

16. Urgent Items

The Chair agreed that the following items be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

17. Investors in People (IIP) Award

On 29 October 1996, the Committee was informed of a pilot initiative in which several North Ayrshire schools were undertaking assessment for the Investors in People Award, a prestigious national award based on a rigorous evaluation of management and quality assurance. In the interim each of the schools has continued to work towards this achievement and the Committee has in the past been notified of those schools which have obtained the award to date.

Submitted report by the Director of Education confirming that both St. John Ogilvie Primary School, Irvine and Cumbrae Primary School have now been successful in obtaining an Investors in People Award following an assessment by IIP Scotland in June.

The Committee agreed to congratulate the two schools on their success.

18. Arran Outdoor Education Resource: Accommodation Proposal

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a proposal to purchase residential accommodation for the Arran Outdoor Education Resource.

On 22 April 1997, the Committee received a presentation on the activities provided by the Arran Outdoor Education Resource and expressed their satisfaction with the provision available and the significant progress being achieved. The Committee were also advised however that there were accommodation difficulties relating to the administration base and equipment storage facility, that suitable alternative accommodation was being explored and that consideration would also require to be given to the residential accommodation which at present is secured through the block booking of beds in the Whiting Bay Youth Hostel.

The report provided details on the Arnhall Centre, Whiting Bay, Arran which was previously used by Save the Children as an outdoor residential centre and which has recently been put on the market for sale. The property is being sold in four lots with a total asking price of £185,000 although only lots 1 and 2 would be required to meet all the Education Directorate's accommodation, administration and equipment base requirements, at a total asking price of £130,000. A further £20,000 would be required for necessary adaptations and there is provision in the capital programme of £150,000 to meet these costs. Save the Children have, however, indicated that they would prefer a single buyer for the whole property. The Committee acknowledged that it would be more appropriate to pursue the purchase of the whole property, which would provide the Council with control of the access road and any future development. It was pointed out, however, that if any part of the property was sold in the future, there is a "clawback clause" which requires a percentage of the profits to be passed on to Save the Children.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) in principle to pursue the acquisition of the whole property at the Arnhall Centre, Arran, subject to a full survey of the property; (b) to refer the proposed purchase to the Support Services Committee for consideration; and if appropriate (c) to authorise the Chief Executive, in conjunction with the Chair of Support Services, to finalise an offer for the property dependent on the final closing date for bids.

The meeting ended at 3.05 p.m.