

Education Committee  
2 June 1998

**Irvine, 2 June 1998** - At a Meeting of the Education Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

**Present**

Thomas Morris, Irene Oldfather, Thomas Barr, Patrick Browne, James Clements, Stewart Dewar, John Donn, Samuel Gooding, Father Matthew McManus, Peter McNamara, David Munn, Alan Munro, David O'Neill, Robert Rae, Evelyn Sillars, Gordon Smith and Reverend John Taylor.

**In Attendance**

The Director of Education, B. Gardner, Head of Education Resources, J. Leckie, J. Tulips and L. Owens, Heads of Education Services, J. Ward, C. Laird, J. McCaffrey and N. McCrone, Advisers and A. Fraser, Senior Administration Officer (Education); J. McHarg, Community Services Development Manager, A. Milson, Adult Education Development Services Officer (Community and Recreational Services); D. Nibloe, Principal Officer, Accountancy (Financial Services); A. Osborne, Corporate Policy Officer, M. McCormick, Media Relations Officer and J. Bannatyne, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

**Chair**

Mr. Morris in the Chair.

**Apologies for Absence**

Thomas Dickie, Margaret Hight, Stef Holmer, John Sillars and George Steven.

**1. Minutes Confirmed**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 21 April 1998, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

**2. Higher Still Geography Video**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the Higher Still Geography Video produced by Education staff in collaboration with the Arran Outdoor Education Resource, an edited version of which was viewed by the Committee at the meeting.

Noted.

**3. New Deal for Schools: Additional Funding**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals for the allocation of an additional £429,000 awarded to North Ayrshire Council to assist with further implementation of the New Deal for Schools. These proposals, which fall within the priorities previously agreed by the Committee and take account of additional requirements attached to this allocation, have been designed to derive maximum long term benefit from expenditure in this financial year because no guarantee has been given that this additional funding will continue into subsequent financial years.

The proposed allocation is as follows:-

- £30,000 towards a National Pilot Scheme on the employment of classroom assistants;
- £113,000 to provide support for the implementation of the National Grid for Learning;
- £83,000 towards the raising of standards in arts, science, environmental studies and physical education in primary schools;
- £106,000 to provide additional resources in the form of books, materials, photocopying etc. in preparation for the new Higher Still courses in August 1999;
- £87,000 to provide further support for planning to raise standards in primary schools, subject department planning in secondary schools, head teacher and advisory service training and data collection and analysis systems; and
- £10,000 to provide further support in relation to European links and the study of modern languages with a view to ensuring a wider participation by schools in home to home exchanges.

As a result of the New Deal for Schools North Ayrshire Council has been allocated over £2m of additional funding for 1998/99.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve these proposals for the allocation of the additional funding and submit them to the Scottish Office for confirmation; and (b) that further reports be submitted on the implementation of these measures.

#### **4. Listening and Learning in the Education Service**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a proposal to introduce a Listening and Learning Policy for Schools to ensure a consistency of approach in dealing with complaints, suggestions, etc.

The proposed policy would include guidance on how parents can register complaints, suggestions or compliments and would explain the manner in which the school would seek to respond. Stress would be placed on openness and responsiveness to complaints and the policy would emphasise the fact that there would be no negative consequences arising from making a complaint. Emphasis would be placed on fairness and on a conciliatory rather than confrontational approach being adopted. Schools would undertake to apologise where genuine mistakes occur and where feasible redress would be offered. Confidentiality would be maintained as far as possible.

Details were also provided on specific features of the proposed complaints procedure in relation to the initial registering of complaints, the steps which can be taken where there is dissatisfaction with responses, the right of appeal and other relevant matters. School Boards would require to be consulted on the proposed policy and training would require to be provided for school staff. Steps would also require to be taken to ensure that the final policy receives adequate publicity.

In response to requests from Members, the Director of Education gave an assurance that the matters raised in relation to (i) malicious complaints against staff; (ii) the provision of a timescale; and (iii) the introduction of an explanatory leaflet will be addressed in connection with the proposed new complaints policy.

After a full discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve these proposals as the basis of a Listening and Learning Policy for Schools; and (b) to request the Director of Education to take the necessary steps of dissemination and training in order to implement the policy.

#### **5. Staff Development and Review**

Submitted report by the Director of Education outlining proposals for the implementation of a Scheme of Staff Development and Review for Teaching Staff in North Ayrshire in accordance with the Guidelines and Checklist provided by the Minister for Education on 26 January 1998, the key points of which stipulate that:-

- all head teachers, teachers and senior staff in schools have an entitlement to staff development and review;
- staff development and review is recognised as a crucial part of the quality assurance process operating in schools;
- the process of review should not be operationally burdensome;
- school staff development co-ordinators should maintain central records of staff development in the interests of school planning; and
- the outcomes of the staff development and review process should be monitored and evaluated.

The policy, details of which were given in the report, reflects the guidelines issued by the Scottish Office and complies with the elements specified in the Scottish Office Checklist for staff development and review. It has been proposed by a review group, including representatives of trade unions and head teachers following consultation with North Ayrshire schools.

The Committee agreed to approve the Scheme of Staff Development and Review.

#### **6. Arts Developments in Schools 1997/98**

Submitted report by the Director of Education providing a detailed summary of the activities of the Adviser in Arts Development during the initial year of her appointment.

Noted.

#### **7. Grants to Organisations Supporting the Arts in Schools 1998/99**

Submitted report by the Director of Education seeking approval to award grants to organisations supporting the Arts in schools.

The Committee agreed to approve the following awards in 1998/99:-

Scottish Opera	£500
Hopscotch Theatre Company	£250
Glasgow Film Theatre Workshops	£250

#### **8. Adult Education: Service Level Agreement**

Submitted report by the Director of Education (a) presenting a monitoring report covering the adult education programme provided through the service level agreement with Community and Recreational Services; and (b) outlining the planned provision for academic session 1998/99.

The operation of the service level agreement is maintained and managed through liaison meetings involving officers from the Education and Community and Recreational Services Directorates and a significant number of students are gaining qualifications. A diverse range of courses is also provided largely as a result of discussion with prospective students.

The Committee agreed to approve the planned course provision for academic session 1998/99.

## **9. Pre-5 Funding and Support**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed arrangements to commission nursery education places from voluntary and private sector providers for every child in their pre-school year in North Ayrshire for which the Government has allocated £1,291,240.

The Education Directorate has set up a database on private and voluntary sector nurseries containing details of all children registered in their pre-school year. The information has been cross matched with similar registrations with Local Authority nurseries to ensure that every child is offered a nursery place and to avoid double funding for individual children. It is anticipated that for 1998/99 1200 Local Authority places and 500 private and voluntary sector places for pre-school year children will require to be provided. A commissioning document has been sent to each relevant private and voluntary group validated by the Scottish Office offering to purchase nursery education places at £850 per place. Additional support will also be available to private and voluntary sector providers in the form of a programme of staff development and training and support staff will work with the providers to ensure that procedures for monitoring and evaluating the service provided are in place. Seconded early years teachers will also advise and support the voluntary and private sector groups in planning the curriculum, monitoring and evaluating practice and reporting to parents.

During discussion some concern was expressed over the proposed level of funding to purchase nursery places, which was considered inadequate, particularly for private sector providers who faced additional accommodation costs. Assurances were however given that the proposed funding levels are higher than those provided prior to the introduction of the voucher system and that the private and voluntary sector groups involved would not be disadvantaged in relation to provision within schools. In addition to the funding provision of £850 per place, the additional support previously outlined will be provided free of charge.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve the arrangements which will be put into place to support the voluntary and private sector providers; and (b) that the Director of Education make appropriate arrangements as soon as possible to meet these providers to clarify the position in relation to the level of funding and the additional support which is to be provided by the Council.

## **10. Footwear and Clothing Voucher Scheme**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the outcome of the tendering procedure for the supply of footwear and clothing vouchers and proposals for an implementation strategy for academic session 1998/99.

Following the Committee's agreement in principle to the introduction of a footwear and clothing voucher scheme, as an alternative to the traditional footwear and clothing grant scheme, only three companies submitted tenders. Two of these companies cannot however provide the requisite mail order facility and the third has indicated that discount levels will have to be reduced if large numbers of orders are placed via the mail order system. Additionally, only one of the three companies has operational outlets within North Ayrshire and the general level of discount being offered in each case is significantly less than anticipated. The companies also have problems in supplying the full range of clothing required.

In the circumstances, the following options are available for consideration:-

- (a) to re-advertise the tender seeking alternative suppliers;
- (b) to accept one of the tenders submitted, albeit none fully comply with the criteria set; or
- (c) to revert to the traditional awarding of a footwear and clothing grant involving the issue of a cheque directly to eligible parents.

In the event that the proposed new voucher scheme is not to proceed, alternative

savings will require to be identified. These could be achieved by reducing the value of the footwear and clothing grant cheque from the current level of £50 to £40, or by altering the eligibility criteria for access to footwear and clothing grant support, thereby reducing the number of recipients for grant. Alternatively, savings could be achieved within the current education budget by a phased implementation of the New Deal enhancements.

In view of the outcome of the tendering process, the Committee agreed to revert to the current practice in issuing footwear and clothing grants for session 1998/99, subject to their being no resultant overspend in the current year's education budget.

### **11. Chess in Schools Initiative**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a proposal by the Scottish Chess Association and the Scottish Junior Chess Association to fund a small scale chess initiative in a North Ayrshire secondary school.

Several primary and secondary schools within North Ayrshire already have a strong chess tradition and the purpose of the proposed initiative is to demonstrate that playing chess regularly can have a direct influence on raising the educational attainment of the pupils involved. The pilot initiative will take place in a secondary school which currently does not have an active chess club and participating pupils will be assessed prior to a short course of chess tuition lasting approximately three months. A control group of pupils not participating in the project will also be assessed. The pilot project will last for a minimum of 10 weeks and will take place at the end of the school day with pupils of all abilities in S1/S2 being encouraged to attend. Whilst the two Associations will purchase the necessary chess sets and boards and pay for coaching, the Scottish Office through Strathclyde University will fund the assessment costs associated with the pilot.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the involvement of a North Ayrshire Secondary School in the initiative; and (b) to receive further reports on its progress.

### **12. Europe Week 1998**

Submitted report by the Director of Education providing comprehensive details on a number of events organised by the Education Directorate in May 1998 to celebrate Europe Week.

The Committee agreed to approve the celebration of Europe Week in future years within the Education Directorate and North Ayrshire schools.

### **13. Support for Language Initiatives**

On 2 December 1997, the Education Committee approved a report confirming the strong position of North Ayrshire schools in modern languages but acknowledged the benefits of increased diversification and of an earlier start. Thereafter, on 10 March 1998, as part of its consideration of the New Deal for Schools, the Committee approved the identification of funding to support language initiatives, and schools were subsequently invited to prepare proposals which met the criteria of developing minority languages and providing opportunities for language learning which would not otherwise be available.

Submitted report by the Director of Education presenting a range of proposals and costs which have now been submitted by a number of nursery, primary and secondary schools. Each initiative requires funding to support the payment of a tutor and to assist with the provision of materials. In the longer term it is hoped that initiatives in the primary and nursery sectors will, if successful, become permanent features with members of staff undertaking training in the appropriate language.

The Committee agreed to approve these proposals to develop modern language

projects.

#### **14. Pupil Participation**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the activities and findings of the Working Group on Pupil Participation which was set up by the Committee in May 1997 to (i) establish current practice in North Ayrshire schools with regard to pupil participation in consultation/decision making through pupils' councils etc; (ii) to investigate examples of good practice outwith North Ayrshire; and (iii) consider whether guidelines should be issued to schools.

The Group, which has now completed its remit, has concluded that:-

- a policy statement on pupil participation, details of which were given in the report, should be issued to schools in North Ayrshire;
- all schools should be informed of the resources and staff support materials on this topic which are accessible through the education resource service; and
- all schools should be made aware of the range of examples of good practice.

The Committee, in noting the action taken by the group, agreed to approve the issue of a policy statement on pupil participation to all schools.

#### **15. Environment Week 1998**

Submitted report by the Director of Education providing detailed information on the outcome of a number of competitions and events organised by the Education Directorate as part of Environment Week 1998.

The Committee agreed to congratulate the young people who took part in the various competitions and events.

#### **16. HMI Report: Kilwinning Academy**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the findings of Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools following an inspection at Kilwinning Academy between October and December 1997 as part of a national sample of secondary education.

The report commended numerous aspects of provision, provided details of the main recommendations identified in the inspection report, and detailed proposals made to address the key points for action which the inspection had raised.

The Committee agreed to approve these proposals.

#### **17. Crosshouse: West Park Schools Closure: Consultation Response**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed response to an East Ayrshire Council consultation paper on a proposal to close West Park School, Crosshouse and to establish a base for hearing impaired pupils at Silverwood Primary School, Kilmarnock.

The Council's response has already been forwarded to East Ayrshire to meet their deadline of 22 May 1998, with the proviso that it is subject to Committee approval. The response confirms that North Ayrshire Council accepts the arguments in favour of the closure of West Park School and supports this aspect of the proposal. However since North Ayrshire Council has recently approved the establishment of a new unit for hearing impaired pupils in Towerlands Primary School, Irvine, which is due to open in August 1998, they have been asked to reconsider their plan to establish a base at Silverwood Primary School, Kilmarnock. The Committee was also advised that further adverse comments on this have been submitted to East Ayrshire Council who are currently reviewing the position.

The Committee agreed to homologate the terms of this response to the consultation

document.

#### **18. Irvine: Surplus Accommodation**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a proposal to declare the property known as Moor Community Nursery, Carrick Drive, Irvine surplus to requirements to enable arrangements to be made for its disposal.

The Committee agreed (a) to declare the property surplus to requirements; and (b) to refer to matter to the Support Services Committee for consideration.

#### **19. Information and Communication Technology for Pupils with Special Educational Needs**

Submitted report by the Director of Education confirming current and proposed arrangements for the use of information and communications technology in support of pupils with special educational needs and inviting members to attend a small exhibition and demonstration of its uses following the meeting.

Noted.

#### **20. Urgent Items**

The Chair agreed that the following item be considered as a matter of urgency.

#### **21. Education Directorate: Millennium Celebrations**

In response to a request by Councillor Clements the Committee agreed that the Director of Education submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee on proposals being progressed by his Directorate to celebrate the Millennium.

The Meeting ended at 3.45 p.m.