

Education Committee
6 August 1996

Irvine, 6 August 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, Stewart Dewar, Samuel Gooding, Father Matthew McManus, David Munn, Alan Munro, Robert Rae, John Sillars, Gordon Smith and Reverend John Taylor.

In Attendance

The Director of Education, Brian Gardner (Head of Education Resources), Lesley Rowson and Jim Leckie (Heads of Education Services), David Nibloe (Principal Officer Accounting and Budgeting) and Sandra Bale (Administration Officer).

Chair

Mr. Morris in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Irene Oldfather, Thomas Dickie, John Donn, Peter McNamara, David O'Neill, Evelyn Sillars and George Steven.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minute of the Meeting of the Committee held on 28 May 1996, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Partnership with Parents: Parent Representation on the Education Committee

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposed parental representation on the Education Committee.

The Education Committee on 16 April 1996, agreed that the established 4 clusters of schools should nominate a total of 7 Members to form a Parental Executive Committee and that that Committee would then nominate one of the 7 to become the parent representative on the Education Committee.

The necessary meetings have now been held and a Parental Executive Committee has been formed which nominated Mr. Stef Holmer of Arran High School Board as the parent representative on the Education Committee. The Executive Committee has also agreed that where any of their Members step down, the appropriate cluster group should nominate a replacement representative at their next scheduled meeting and should that Member stepping down be the Education Committee representative, the remaining 6 Members of the Executive Committee should nominate a replacement from their number.

The Committee agreed (a) to note the outcome of the 4 school board cluster meetings and the nominated Members of the new Parental Executive Committee; (b) to approve the nomination of Mr. Stef Holmer as the parent representative on the Education Committee; and (c) to approve the arrangements for the replacement of the Education Committee parent representative or any parent on the Parental Executive Committee.

3. Nursery Education Initiative

Submitted report by the Director of Education on progress on the implementation of the Nursery Education Initiative.

As of 16 July 1996, 1,559 applications for nursery vouchers from parents in North Ayrshire had been received by Capita the company operating the voucher scheme and 1,518 vouchers had been issued. The estimated number of children in their pre school year in North Ayrshire is 1,734 and there are 28 locations in North Ayrshire providing a possible total of 1,200 Local Authority nursery places for 4 year olds. As of the end of term, 980 four year olds had been registered for places in Local Authority provision and it is anticipated that this number will increase at the start of the new term when parents have received their vouchers.

All voluntary and private sector pre five groups registered by the Local Authority were eligible to apply for registration with the Scottish Office to be providers under the Nursery Voucher Scheme and 33 groups have been approved to date providing approximately 600 places.

The Ayrshire Child Care Information Service will be providing information on child care and nursery education provision in North Ayrshire to all pre five groups, schools, community centres, etc.

The Local Authority nursery classes will be opening on 26th August 1996. It is proposed to hold any applications for places for 3 year olds until September and, if there are places available, to allocate these in terms of the approved criteria.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to (a) note the progress being made in implementing the Nursery Education Initiative; and (b) instruct the Director of Education to report back in due course on the total number of places which would be required to make provision for all 3 and 4 year olds and on the cost of making such provision.

4. Modern Languages in the Primary School

Submitted report by the Director of Education on Phase 4 of the Modern Languages in the Primary School Training Programme.

At the meeting of the Education Committee on 28 May 1996, the Committee was advised that bids for inclusion in primary French training had been submitted to the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, on behalf of Auchenharvie Academy, Kilwinning Academy and Ardrossan Academy Associated Schools. SOEID has now awarded training places to all primary schools in the Auchenharvie and Kilwinning clusters and to James Reid School in Saltcoats. No award of places has, however, been made to the Ardrossan Academy cluster. The specific grant allocated to the Authority for the in-service training of teachers was therefore looked at and by redirecting some of that allocation, extra training places have been created to include the Ardrossan Academy cluster. The impact on the in-service training will be that some other courses may have to be delayed or reduced.

SOEID has still to announce whether there will be a Phase 5 of the Modern Languages in the Primary School Programme and if this comes about North Ayrshire Council will be in a position to submit bids to train staff in other languages and thus expand the range of languages taught.

The Committee approved the developments in the Modern Languages in the Primary School Training Programme as outlined in the report.

5. Procedures and Support for HMI Inspections of Schools

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a proposed policy on procedures and support for HMI inspections of schools.

The Committee on 5 March 1996, agreed to initiate a number of Policy Review Groups to prepare documents for consultation with schools. The group established to consider procedures and support for HMI inspections of schools in North Ayrshire has now completed its task and reported.

Schools welcomed the clarity of the draft proposals and commented positively on the support for schools which is being proposed by the Authority. Respondents emphasised the importance of schools developing their own rigorous evaluation procedures. There was a recognition of the importance of including parents in discussion at an early stage on HMI's about the published report. Several respondents also emphasised the need to ensure that a press release containing a balanced summary of the report's contents should be agreed by the Authority and the Head Teacher. Schools welcomed the development of a support pack of materials for schools offering advice on the preparation, process and follow-up requirements of HMI inspections and this is currently being prepared. The procedures will be implemented from August 1996 with a review taking place during the 1997/98 school session. The Director of Education confirmed that all elected members will receive copies of HMI reports.

After discussion the Education Committee approved the policy document for issue to schools.

6. HMI Report on Irvine Royal Academy

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the HMI report on Irvine Royal Academy.

Irvine Royal Academy was inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) during the period between January and February 1996 as part of a national sample of secondary education. The report by HMI was published on 10 June 1996, identifying a number of strengths of the school and making a number of recommendations.

Following the publication of the report, the Head of Service and Senior Adviser met the school's Senior Management Team to discuss the way forward. It is intended that, in consultation with the Senior Adviser and Senior Management Team, the Head Teacher will prepare a draft action plan which will address the recommendations of the report. The Head Teacher and the Depute will also initiate the development of a quality assurance system in learning and teaching, including the specification of agreed quality standards throughout the schools; the development of quality assessments to support performance monitoring and ensure improvement; and the identification of staff responsible for monitoring and taking action. A member of the Advisory Service will also remain in contact with the school during the follow up period.

The Director of Education confirmed that the review group on quality assurance had met and reported and that the information had been disseminated to schools. The Committee on 28 May 1996 had also agreed when approving the policy document on quality assurance that a working group to review arrangements for staff development and appraisal be established. Notwithstanding this agreement, in terms of responding to the HMI report, the quality assurance systems at Irvine Royal Academy, require to be examined now. Assurances were however given that any action taken at Irvine Royal Academy in terms of quality assurance will not prejudice the work of the review group on staff development and appraisal.

After discussion the Committee approved the proposals as detailed in the report to address the key points for action in the HMI report on Irvine Royal Academy.

7. Scheme of Arrangements for School Board Elections

Submitted report by the Director of Education on school board elections and development.

The School Boards (Scotland) Act, 1988 requires every Education Authority to establish a school board for each primary, special and secondary school in its area. Boards are made up of

parent, staff and co-opted members. In North Ayrshire, 62 out of 67 schools currently have a school board. This represents a percentage of 92.5% compared with a national average of 75% and is therefore among the highest levels of representation of any Education Authority in Scotland.

Under Schedule 1 of the School Board (Scotland) Act, every Education Authority is required to make arrangements for the holding of elections for parent and staff school board members. An election scheme is proposed for North Ayrshire which will represent the fulfilment of that requirement.

Furthermore a number of changes to School Board legislation are contained within the Education (Scotland) Act which received the royal assent on 18 July 1996. This Act makes particular changes to the election arrangements which are designed to simplify and regularise their operation. The new Act will alter the procedures in the following ways:-

(a) by 1997 biennial elections will be held nationally at the same time between 1 September and 30 November;

(b) by-elections for any casual vacancies will normally be held annually during this period, unless a board request an earlier election;

(c) out of phase schools will come back into line, holding elections within the regular election period; and

(d) boards will be able to co-opt up to 2 parent members to fill any vacancies not filled after a by-election. These parents can remain on the Board until the next appropriate biennial election period.

The Director of Education confirmed that parents have been encouraged in the past to attend meetings and stand for election for school boards and that this process will be continued.

The Committee agreed to (a) note the current position of school boards in North Ayrshire and the changes in the school board legislation; and (b) approve the scheme of election arrangements for school boards, as detailed in the report.

8. School Transport

Submitted report by the Director of Education detailing proposals to rectify historical anomalies identified in the school transport arrangements to bring such provision within current policy.

In processing applications for assistance with school transport it has become evident that there are anomalies in the arrangements made by Strathclyde Regional Council and subsequently adopted by North Ayrshire Council. Although a few schools are affected these inconsistencies do constitute breaches of policy and they have implications for other operational procedures as well as transport. In essence a number of families are in receipt of transport for children already in school even where they did not and do not now qualify. Examples of this exist where children who could not be accommodated at their local primary school have been redirected to an adjacent school and then in transferring to secondary school have opted to go to the secondary school associated with the redirected school rather than their local secondary. Transport should not have been agreed in such cases.

Some members expressed concern over the loss of assistance for families particularly where pupils were choosing to attend secondary schools associated with redirected primary schools and over the application of a policy which could result in families being split with some members receiving transport costs and other not.

The Director of Education reported that new information required deletion of paragraphs 2.5, 2.6 and 3.3 of the report. Having considered this and the issues raised by members and following considerable discussion the Committee agreed (a) that in cases where children have been granted transport to a school in breach of Council policy, that transport should be continued

for children already in receipt of this provision; (b) that any further applications for transport will be dealt with in accordance with the policy of North Ayrshire Council but where this could result in families being split, the Directorate will consider applications for privilege passes on existing transport should there be spaces available; (c) that steps be taken to ensure that all staff within the Education Directorate be fully aware of the current transport policy and procedures; (d) that arrangements be made to advise School Boards and parents of the Council's policy on school transport; and (e) to instruct the Director of Education to undertake a review of school transport policy with particular reference to pupils who had been redirected from their catchment area school due to a lack of places at the time of application.

9. The Higher Still Development Programme

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the current position of the Higher Still Development Programme which is intended to reform the courses and qualifications available to students in Scotland at the upper stages of secondary education. A fundamental aim of Higher Still is to encourage higher and broader achievement by all students. While there is much to be commended in the aims of Higher Still, considerable concerns remain regarding the development programme, including issues relating to credibility of assessment with employers and higher education, timetabling difficulties, resource provision and industrial relations. The implications of the reforms are still being considered by the teaching unions.

A Higher Still Advisory Group consisting of representative Head Teachers, advisers and members of the Directorate has been established to co-ordinate developments in North Ayrshire.

The Committee agreed (a) to note the current national position in relation to the Higher Still Development Programme; (b) to approve the steps taken to date in North Ayrshire; and (c) that further reports on progress in implementing the new system be submitted as appropriate.

10. School Admissions: Secondary Schools

Submitted report by the Director of Education on admission arrangements to secondary schools.

The current arrangements for admission to a secondary school are based on either (i) attendance at an associated primary school; (ii) living in the catchment area of an associated primary school; or (iii) parental choice through a placing request. Under this system, secondary schools do not have a catchment or delineated area and such a system can lead to confusion in terms of the transfer arrangements between primary and secondary schools, the priorities for admission and the eligibility for free school transport. Specific issues which require to be addressed are those of Skelmorlie Primary School which at present is formally associated with Greenock High School in Inverclyde Council and the merger of Argyll and Kylehill Primary School, Saltcoats which has left a split catchment area and association with both Auchendarvie and Ardrossan Academies.

Primary schools already have delineated catchment areas and it is proposed that consideration be given to establishing delineated areas for all secondary schools.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) that the Director of Education should prepare consultative documents on the creation of delineated areas for all secondary schools; and (b) that these consultative documents be submitted to a future meeting of the Education Committee for consideration.

11. Surplus Accommodation: Janitorial Houses

Submitted report by the Director of Education on janitorial houses.

The Education Directorate has a number of houses for use by janitors attached to various school sites. Changes in the pattern of janitorial employment have, however, resulted in a

number of houses not being occupied but retained for future janitorial use. The houses in this situation at present are at Auchenharvie Academy (2 semi-detached houses); Kilwinning Academy; and St. Michael's Academy. At present there is no interest in occupying these houses from janitors assigned to the schools in question. The houses are in need of repair and refurbishment and are currently boarded up.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to declare the 4 vacant janitors' houses at Auchenharvie Academy, Kilwinning Academy, and St. Michael's Academy surplus to Education Directorate requirements; (b) to authorise the Legal Services Manager to dispose of these houses in the most appropriate manner; and (c) that in the event of further janitorial houses falling vacant, the merits of retaining or disposing of them be considered on an individual basis.

12. Spier's Trust

Submitted report by the Director of Education on requests from the Spier's Trust Committee.

At its first meeting on 24 June 1996, the Spier's Trust Committee agreed to seek the co-option of Mr. Tom Hart, given his considerable experience as a Trustee during the former Strathclyde Regional Council's previous administration of the Trust. It was further agreed, that North Ayrshire Council should be asked to meet the costs of advertising and members travel, to maximise the funds available for disbursement as grants.

The Committee agreed (a) to co-opt Mr. Tom Hart as a Trustee to serve on the Spier's Trust Committee; and (b) to meet the costs of the newspaper advertising seeking Spier Grant applications and the payment of any additional expenses for members, e.g. travel.

The Meeting ended at 3.15 p.m.