

Education Committee
3 June 1997

Irvine, 3 June 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, Stef Holmer, Father Matthew McManus, Peter McNamara, David Munn, Alan Munro, Gordon Smith, George Steven and Reverend John Taylor

In Attendance

The Director of Education, B. Gardner, Head of Education Resources, L. Rowson, J. Leckie, J. Tulips, Heads of Education Services, J. Ward, C. Laird, Advisers (Education), D. Nibloe, Principal Officer Accountancy (Financial Services) and S. Bale, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

Chair

Mr Morris in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Stewart Dewar, John Donn, Robert Rae, John Sillars and Evelyn Sillars.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 22 April 1997, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Arrangements for Pupils Attending Caledonia Primary School to Transfer to Secondary School

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals for future arrangements for pupils transferring from Caledonia Primary School to Secondary School.

When the merger of the former Argyle Primary School and the former Kyleshill Primary School to form the new school, Caledonia Primary, was completed on 13 November 1996 no decision was taken regarding the arrangements for the transfer of primary seven pupils to secondary school. Currently those pupils who live within the catchment area of the former Argyle Primary School transfer to Ardrossan Academy and those pupils who live within the former Kyleshill Primary catchment area transfer to Auchendarvie Academy. This is considered unsatisfactory and a consultation document has therefore been drawn up outlining two options for transfer and the implications of each. Option one is that all Caledonia Primary School pupils transfer to Auchendarvie Academy and option two is that all pupils transfer to Ardrossan Academy. It is intended that the consultation document be widely circulated and there will be an opportunity for parents to meet with officers of the Education Directorate if so requested. With regard to the capacity figure for Ardrossan Academy, it was confirmed that the figure has been agreed with the Head Teacher, taking into account the concerns expressed by HMI regarding the pressure on the accommodation at the school. In relation to Auchendarvie Academy, the question was raised as to the need for a traffic management scheme at the school.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that (a) the consultation document on arrangements for pupils attending Caledonia Primary School to transfer to secondary school be issued to all interested parties; (b) those parties be asked to make written representation on the proposals to

the Director of Education no later than 1 September 1997; (c) the need for a traffic management scheme at Auchenharvie Academy be considered as part of the consultation process; and (d) the Director of Education prepare a report on the results of the consultative process for consideration at a future meeting of the Committee.

3. School Dress Code

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the work of the Policy Review Group on the School Dress Code.

As part of its review of policies, the Committee established a Review Group which included two elected members, representatives of the Parental Executive Committee of North Ayrshire School Boards Forum and Head Teachers to consider the policy on school dress. A draft policy was issued by the Review Group for consultation to all educational establishments, the Parental Executive Committee and Trade Unions. Head Teachers were also encouraged to discuss the proposals with their School Boards. A very positive response was received in favour of establishing a School Dress Code. The main issue raised by respondents was that the power of Head Teachers to insist on school uniform being worn should be increased. A policy document has therefore been drawn up on the establishment of a dress code for schools, advising schools to undertake a consultation exercise on the type of dress appropriate to their school. It was considered that flexibility in the dress code would be advantageous, but certain categories of clothing have been defined which are unacceptable under any circumstances. Parents, the School Board and pupils should be consulted. A school would require to demonstrate its policy was reasonable and that parents had had ample opportunity to comply with it if disciplinary action were to be supported in the case of persistent non-compliance with a School Dress Code. Footwear and clothing grants are available to those who are eligible and some schools have supplies of certain types of clothing which they make available free of charge.

After a full discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to adopt the policy document on a Dress Code for North Ayrshire Schools; (b) to issue the document to all schools and School Boards; and (c) that a report reviewing how the policy has worked be submitted to the Committee after a period of one year.

4. Central Technician's Service: Review of Joint Arrangements

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the operation of the Central Technician's Service under the joint management arrangement.

Following the reorganisation of local government, it was agreed that the former Strathclyde Regional Council Ayr Division Central Technician Service be continued under a joint management arrangement involving North, East and South Ayrshire Councils. The service given to schools goes beyond that provided by the school-based Technician Service e.g. a repairs service for computers and associated peripherals, audio visual equipment, science equipment, tools in technical departments and equipment in Art and Home Economic departments. The staffing establishment comprises 9.8 full time equivalent staff, 3.8 of whom are substantive employees of North Ayrshire Council. A number of factors have affected the service since the joint management arrangement was set up, including a reduction in the number of staff and reductions in central budgets resulting in each Council requiring to make a different level of saving on their contribution to the service. The staffing reductions have also reduced the range of service provided. The service does, however, continue to provide an efficient repair service particularly in relation to computers and electronic equipment resulting in an economy of scale through having a central repair service.

There are some concerns regarding the sustainability of the level of service in the future. Furthermore the increasing range of computers and the complexity of computer systems used in schools may begin to stretch the expertise of the central service technicians.

In light of the uncertainties highlighted, it is proposed that a contingency plan be explored for the establishment of a North Ayrshire Central Technician Service to ensure continuity of service,

should the current joint arrangement become unsustainable.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the continued operation of the joint arrangement for the Central Technician Service until the end of this financial year; and (b) that a further review of the service be submitted to the Committee prior to the preparation of the budget for financial year 1998/99.

5. Irvine Royal Academy Health Initiative

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the progress of the health initiative at Irvine Royal Academy and proposals for its ongoing development.

On 16 April 1996, the Committee approved the terms of a pilot project involving Ayrshire and Arran Health Board which provided a health exercise facility within the Physical Education Department of Irvine Royal Academy to which patients would be referred by General Practitioners in the Irvine area.

The project has provided improved facilities for the school including new fitness equipment which is also used by pupils. There have been 200 patients using the facilities to date and there is a waiting list for the scheme. The pupils have also benefited in that there has been an increase in the uptake of certificate courses and increased interest in physical education. The issue of security has been addressed using new organisational arrangements for patients entering and exiting the school. The linkage of the project to the Magnum Leisure Centre has also worked well, with all participants being introduced to the Magnum's fitness facilities. Ayrshire and Arran Health Board are currently seeking to expand the scheme into other parts of their area.

The Committee agreed (a) to note the success of the present exercise referral pilot project in Irvine Royal Academy; (b) to approve the continued operation of the project in conjunction with Ayrshire and Arran Health Board; (c) to approve the ongoing exploration of potential developments of the scheme and (d) that the Director of Education submit a further progress report on the project to a future meeting.

6. School Admission Policy

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed changes to the policy on school admissions.

As part of its review of policies, the Committee established a Review Group, including two elected members, two Head Teachers and a Head of Service, to consider the procedures and criteria to be used in allocating places to pupils whose parents make a placing request to the school of their choice. A consultation paper has been prepared proposing amendments to the current admission arrangements including (i) clarification of the delineated area criteria for secondary schools; (ii) clarification of the circumstances in which medical grounds will be accepted; (iii) removal of the "other factors" which may be taken into account; and (iv) removal of the role of the Local Attendance Council in advising on the allocation of places, where there are more placing requests than places available, and the transfer of this role to the Director of Education. The Local Attendance Council has made the suggestion that they should no longer be involved in determining placing requests and that due to the difficulties in applying the "other factors" criteria these should be removed. Parents whose placing request has been refused can appeal against the decision to an Appeals Committee involving elected members.

With regard to new pupils moving into an area, whilst they will be given a high priority for admission, at present it is not possible to reserve places for them nor can existing pupils who are in a school by way of a placing request be moved from that school to accommodate pupils who move into the area.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that (a) the school admission criteria consultation paper be issued to all interested parties in terms of the Education Publication and Consultation (Scotland) Regulations 1981; (b) those parties be asked to make written submission on the

consultation paper to the Director of Education no later than 1 September 1997; (c) the Director of Education submit a report on the results of the consultation process, taking into account members' comments, to a future meeting.

7. Music Instructor Service

Submitted report by the Director of Education on arrangements for instrumental instruction in North Ayrshire schools.

The instrumental service covers all cluster groups in North Ayrshire and provides opportunities for pupils to learn to play a musical instrument. The allocation of instrumental instruction to schools takes into account (i) the secondary school roll; (ii) the P5, P6 and P7 roll in the associated primary schools; and (iii) an enhancement to the roll figures based on pupils in receipt of footwear and clothing grants. It is proposed that an Officer Working Group be established to consider a number of issues which require to be addressed in relation to the future provision of music tuition in North Ayrshire, including the priority to be given to wind and string instruments, and the role of electronic keyboard and vocal tuition within the service.

After a full discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve the establishment of an Officer Working Group including appropriate primary and secondary Head Teachers, as well as representatives of Instructors and Principal Teachers of Music, to consider future developments in the Music Instructor Service; and (b) that the Working Group consider whether music provision in special needs schools can be enhanced through e.g. access to Health Board funding.

8. Ayrshire Education Business Partnership Revised Memorandum and Articles of Association

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals for a revised Memorandum and Articles of Association for the Ayrshire Education Business Partnership.

The Ayrshire Education Business Partnership was established as a joint member company comprising Strathclyde Regional Council and Enterprise Ayrshire. At the reorganisation of local government, the responsibilities of Strathclyde Regional Council as the joint member of the Education Business Partnership became the collective responsibility of North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire and East Ayrshire Councils, but under the revised arrangements the three Councils secured only one collective vote because they were taking over the single rights of the former Strathclyde Regional Council. It is, however, considered appropriate for each Council to hold individual member rights within the company and following discussions between the legal representatives of the three Councils and Enterprise Ayrshire, the Memorandum and Articles of Association for the Company have been revised accordingly.

The key revisions stipulate that the Company shall have four members, namely North Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council and Enterprise Ayrshire and that when decisions are being taken by members, each Council member shall have one vote and Enterprise Ayrshire shall have three votes. Additionally, there will be no casting vote, all issues must be debated to a consensus, all members must be present for a quorum and any member may appoint a proxy to vote on its behalf at any meeting.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the revised Memorandum and Articles of Association as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report; (b) that the North Ayrshire Council member's proxy be lodged with the Director of Education or his representative, to be used in the event that an elected member of the Council is unable to attend a meeting of the members of the Company; (c) to nominate the Chair and the Director of Education to serve as alternate Directors on the Board of Directors if required; and (d) that the Director of Education submit a report on the programme of activities of the Ayrshire Education Business Partnership to a future meeting.

9. Europe Week 1997

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the events involving North Ayrshire schools during Europe Week 1997.

The Council has made clear its commitment to European matters and on 11 March 1997, the Committee agreed to approve the proposed programme of events which schools would employ to promote Europe Week 1997. Events included a conference "Living and Working in Europe", a poster competition and a European quiz. All events proved extremely popular and helpful in increasing the profile of Europe Week and European matters and it is hoped to build on the Week by making it an annual event.

The Committee agreed that (a) a programme of events to celebrate Europe Week be held annually within North Ayrshire schools; and (b) the report be referred to the Member/Officer Working Group on European matters for consideration.

10. The European Dimension in North Ayrshire Schools

Submitted report by the Director of Education on how the European Dimension is being developed in North Ayrshire schools.

The European Dimension is a collective term for a number of strategies designed to promote and encourage teaching about Europe, European nations, institutions and the way of life in other European countries. Within the curriculum, the European dimension is being promoted through the teaching programme in virtually all areas. Within North Ayrshire, a number of initiatives are underway to promote the European Dimension including links with other education departments in Europe. EU funding for a range of initiatives has been obtained under the auspices of the Socrates Programme. It is proposed to build on these initiatives through further developments including (i) attempting to enlarge the list of contacts with authorities in other European countries e.g. Sweden, Portugal, including countries in Eastern Europe; (ii) extending the current E-mail pilot into a European context; and (iii) initiating student visits to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, all of which can be supported by European funding.

The Committee agreed the continuing development of European projects as detailed in the report.

11. UK/Germany Area Links Initiative

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the development of educational links between North Ayrshire and Mittel-Hessen, Germany.

In November 1996, all local authorities in the United Kingdom were invited to submit bids for inclusion in a programme intended to provide opportunities for students to gain valuable linguistic experience and develop awareness of issues between Scotland and Germany. The bid submitted by the Education Directorate was successful and schools in North Ayrshire will be linked with schools in the Mittel-Hessen area. Proposals include (i) a minimum of three school partnerships using EU-Comenius funding; (ii) a link involving James McFarlane school and a German establishment to produce teaching materials for pupils with special educational needs; and (iii) an exchange of young people in the 14 - 16 age range with accommodation being provided in families. An invitation has been received from Mittel-Hessen for a delegation from North Ayrshire to visit Marburg in Mittel-Hessen in July 1997.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the continued development of the links between North Ayrshire and Mittel-Hessen, as detailed in the report; and (b) to nominate the Chair to lead the delegation to Marburg in July 1997.

12. Environment Week 1997

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the involvement of North Ayrshire schools in Environment Week 1997.

On 3 December 1996, the Committee approved a programme of events involving schools in Environment Week 1997, 10 - 18 May 1997. The programme included an Art competition, a poetry event, a debating competition and a pupil conference. All events were very successful and entries to the competitions were of a very high standard.

The Committee agreed (a) to congratulate the young people who took part in the competitions and events; and (b) that the Director of Education submit a report to a future meeting on what action can be taken on the issues raised in relation to school playgrounds at the pupil conference.

13. School Transport: Redirected Pupils

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the number of pupils unable to be accommodated in their local schools and the associated transport costs for session 1996/97.

On 17 September 1996, the Committee agreed that (a) pupils who have been redirected from their catchment area primary school and for whom a place has not become available by Primary 7 could 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 redirected and the implications in terms of school transport.

During session 1996/97, a total of ten primary age pupils were unable to be accommodated at their local school. Four secondary pupils who were redirected from their local primary school chose to transfer with their peer group to Greenwood Academy at the P7 to S1 transfer. The financial implications of meeting the costs of transport for these redirected pupils amounted to £1,371.00 in 1996/97, and these costs can be accommodated.

The Committee agreed (a) to continue the current policy and procedures in relation to school transport where pupils cannot be accommodated at their local school; and (b) that the situation continue to be monitored and a further report submitted in the event of any substantial increase in costs.

14. Nursery Vouchers: Transitional Arrangements

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the Government's intention to discontinue nursery vouchers from 1998.

Following the announcement by the Government that nursery vouchers will be abolished after the current school session and a new system of funding nursery education is to be put into place by August 1998, a transition arrangement has been established for session 1997/98 whereby there will only be one issue of voucher books to cover the whole year from August 1997 to June 1998. This simplifies the present system, as nurseries will only need to sign once for each child, thus reducing the administrative workload for nursery staff.

Noted.

15. Provision for Visually Impaired Children

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the arrangements for visually impaired children and proposals to improve resources for such children within Irvine Royal Academy.

Most visually impaired children in North Ayrshire are supported within their own local primary and secondary schools, utilising the schools' own resources and resources provided by a variety of centralised services. This arrangement works well for the vast majority of visually impaired children, but for some children the transition from primary to secondary school can create difficulties.

It is proposed that the Council designate a secondary school for visually impaired pupils, with Irvine Royal Academy being the recommended school as in August 1997 a small group of visually impaired pupils are due to commence attending the school which already has ramped access and lifts. The facilities at Irvine Royal Academy would be enhanced in a variety of ways to create a specialist support base with staffing expertise which could be used to support other schools. Irvine Royal Academy would not be promoted as a magnet school for visually impaired pupils, but would give parents additional choice as to whether their children should attend the Academy or their local school. It is hoped that this measure will encourage parents to keep their children at school within North Ayrshire rather than send them to schools with such facilities outwith North Ayrshire.

Assurances were given that all health and safety aspects are being addressed to ensure that children with disabilities can be integrated where appropriate into mainstream schools and that a survey is in place to look at the range of suitable facilities within schools and to identify any deficiencies.

The Committee agreed to approve the development of an enhanced resource for secondary age visually impaired pupils at Irvine Royal Academy.

16. Transport of School Children: 1997/98 Special School and Medical Contracts

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the tenders received in respect of schools transport for children with special needs and for children with medical conditions.

A specification and appropriate guidance notes will be provided to tenderers for such contracts. Processes are in place to deal with issues, such as contracts coming up for renewal throughout the year. Arrangements are also in hand for carrying out inspections on the vehicles being provided.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) that contracts be awarded for 1997/98 as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, including (i) one contract being awarded to a firm who submitted multiple bids who were the lowest overall; and (ii) five contracts being awarded to the firms whose offer was equal lowest with other contractors; and (b) that the three contracts which require to be re-advertised be awarded and reported to the Committee in due course.

17. Surplus Accommodation

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposal to dispose of a house at Kilwinning Academy which is surplus to requirements.

On 6 August 1996, the Committee agreed to dispose of four vacant janitors houses and in the event of further janitorial houses falling vacant, the merits of retaining or disposing of them be considered on an individual basis.

The tenant of the janitorial house at 32b Dalry Road, Kilwinning, which is associated with Kilwinning Academy has applied to purchase the house in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. The tenant carries out janitorial duties for Stanecastle School. There is no interest in occupying the house from janitors assigned to Kilwinning Academy.

The Committee agreed (a) to declare the janitor's house at 32b Dalry Road, Kilwinning surplus to the Education Directorate requirements; (b) to authorise the Legal Services Manager to dispose of the house to the tenant; and (c) to refer the disposal to the Support Services Committee

for their information.

18. Further Education in North Ayrshire

Submitted report by the Director of Education on investigations regarding the siting of a Community Learning Centre in Auchenharvie Academy.

On 27 May 1997, the Corporate Strategy Committee noted the position on the progress by James Watt College in pursuing PFI and ERDF funding for the establishment of a North Ayrshire College and the associated Community Learning Centre in the Three Towns. Further details of the proposals for the Community Learning Centre have now been provided which indicate a clear preference, from the college's point of view, for a location in Auchenharvie Academy, Stevenston. The location of the Community Learning Centre at Auchenharvie Academy could be beneficial for the school itself in that the development would reduce the surplus accommodation at the school; would necessitate relocating and refurbishing rooms currently being used by the school, providing students and staff with better facilities; and with the advent of Higher Still in 1999, would provide pupils with extended opportunities for linking with college courses.

The Committee approved the continued investigation of Auchenharvie Academy, Stevenston as a site for a Community Learning Centre, as part of the James Watt College proposals.

19. Early Intervention: Grants Programme

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposal to apply to the Early Intervention Grants Programme.

On 9 May 1997, the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department invited local authorities to submit bids for funding to support schemes designed to improve literacy and numeracy in primary schools. In order to meet the closing date, an application has been submitted, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chairs, subject to final approval by the Committee. The application is for a 3 year scheme which includes resources for additional staffing, training workshops and support for parents. The schools to be involved in the project have been identified through the percentage uptake by pupils of footwear and clothing grants.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the application under the Early Intervention Grants Programme to SOEID; and (b) to note that the outcome of the application will be reported to the Committee in due course.

20. Alternatives to Exclusion: Grants Programme

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposal to apply to the Alternatives to Exclusion Grants Programme.

On 13 May 1997, the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department invited local authorities to submit bids for funding to support schemes designed to explore alternatives to exclusion from school.

In order to meet the closing date, an application has been submitted, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chairs, subject to final approval by the Committee. The application is for a 3 year scheme and includes a proposal to provide Support Bases within secondary schools in North Ayrshire, as an alternative to exclusions and specialised placements in other schools.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the application under the Alternatives to Exclusion Grant Programme to SOEID; and (b) to note that the outcome of the application will be reported to the Committee in due course.

The meeting ended at 3.35 p.m.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 22 April 1997, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Arrangements for Pupils Attending Caledonia Primary School to Transfer to Secondary School

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After discussion, the Committee agreed that (a) the consultation document on arrangements for pupils attending Caledonia Primary School to transfer to secondary school be issued to all interested parties; (b) those parties be asked to make written representation on the proposals to the Director of Education no later than 1 September 1997; (c) the need for a traffic management scheme at Auchenharvie Academy be considered as part of the consultation process; and (d) the Director of Education prepare a report on the results of the consultative process for consideration at a future meeting of the Committee.

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There are some concerns regarding the sustainability of the level of service in the future. Furthermore the increasing range of computers and the complexity of computer systems used in schools may begin to stretch the expertise of the central service technicians.

In light of the uncertainties highlighted, it is proposed that a contingency plan be explored for the establishment of a North Ayrshire Central Technician Service to ensure continuity of service, should the current joint arrangement become unsustainable.

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The Committee agreed (a) to note the success of the present exercise referral pilot project in Irvine Royal Academy; (b) to approve the continued operation of the project in conjunction with Ayrshire and Arran Health Board; (c) to approve the ongoing exploration of potential developments

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Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals for a revised Memorandum and Articles of Association for the Ayrshire Education Business Partnership.

The Ayrshire Education Business Partnership was established as a joint member company comprising Strathclyde Regional Council and Enterprise Ayrshire. At the reorganisation of local government, the responsibilities of Strathclyde Regional Council as the joint member of the Education Business Partnership became the collective responsibility of North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire and East Ayrshire Councils, but under the revised arrangements the three Councils secured only one collective vote because they were taking over the single rights of the former Strathclyde Regional Council. It is, however, considered appropriate for each Council to hold individual member rights within the company and following discussions between the legal representatives of the three Councils and Enterprise Ayrshire, the Memorandum and Articles of Association for the Company have been revised accordingly.

The key revisions stipulate that the Company shall have four members, namely North Ayrshire Council, East Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council and Enterprise Ayrshire and that when decisions are being taken by members, each Council member shall have one vote and Enterprise Ayrshire shall have three votes. Additionally, there will be no casting vote, all issues must be debated to a consensus, all members must be present for a quorum and any member may appoint a proxy to vote on its behalf at any meeting.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the revised Memorandum and Articles of Association as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report; (b) that the North Ayrshire Council member's proxy be lodged with the Director of Education or his representative, to be used in the event that an elected member of the Council is unable to attend a meeting of the members of the Company; (c) to nominate the Chair and the Director of Education to serve as alternate Directors on the Board of Directors if required; and (d) that the Director of Education submit a report on the programme of activities of the Ayrshire Education Business Partnership to a future meeting.

9. Europe Week 1997

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the events involving North Ayrshire schools during Europe Week 1997.

The Council has made clear its commitment to European matters and on 11 March 1997, the Committee agreed to approve the proposed programme of events which schools would employ to promote Europe Week 1997. Events included a conference "Living and Working in Europe", a poster competition and a European quiz. All events proved extremely popular and helpful in increasing the profile of Europe Week and European matters and it is hoped to build on the Week by making it an annual event.

The Committee agreed that (a) a programme of events to celebrate Europe Week be held annually within North Ayrshire schools; and (b) the report be referred to the Member/Officer Working Group on European matters for consideration.

10. The European Dimension in North Ayrshire Schools

Submitted report by the Director of Education on how the European Dimension is being developed in North Ayrshire schools.

The European Dimension is a collective term for a number of strategies designed to promote and encourage teaching about Europe, European nations, institutions and the way of life in other European countries. Within the curriculum, the European dimension is being promoted through the teaching programme in virtually all areas. Within North Ayrshire, a number of initiatives are underway to promote the European Dimension including links with other education

departments in Europe. EU funding for a range of initiatives has been obtained under the auspices of the Socrates Programme. It is proposed to build on these initiatives through further developments including (i) attempting to enlarge the list of contacts with authorities in other European countries e.g. Sweden, Portugal, including countries in Eastern Europe; (ii) extending the current E-mail pilot into a European context; and (iii) initiating student visits to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, all of which can be supported by European funding.

The Committee agreed the continuing development of European projects as detailed in the report.

11. UK/Germany Area Links Initiative

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the development of educational links between North Ayrshire and Mittel-Hessen, Germany.

In November 1996, all local authorities in the United Kingdom were invited to submit bids for inclusion in a programme intended to provide opportunities for students to gain valuable linguistic experience and develop awareness of issues between Scotland and Germany. The bid submitted by the Education Directorate was successful and schools in North Ayrshire will be linked with schools in the Mittel-Hessen area. Proposals include (i) a minimum of three school partnerships using EU-Comenius funding; (ii) a link involving James McFarlane school and a German establishment to produce teaching materials for pupils with special educational needs; and (iii) an exchange of young people in the 14 - 16 age range with accommodation being provided in families. An invitation has been received from Mittel-Hessen for a delegation from North Ayrshire to visit Marburg in Mittel-Hessen in July 1997.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the continued development of the links between North Ayrshire and Mittel-Hessen, as detailed in the report; and (b) to nominate the Chair to lead the delegation to Marburg in July 1997.

12. Environment Week 1997

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the involvement of North Ayrshire schools in Environment Week 1997.

On 3 December 1996, the Committee approved a programme of events involving schools in Environment Week 1997, 10 - 18 May 1997. The programme included an Art competition, a poetry event, a debating competition and a pupil conference. All events were very successful and entries to the competitions were of a very high standard.

The Committee agreed (a) to congratulate the young people who took part in the competitions and events; and (b) that the Director of Education submit a report to a future meeting on what action can be taken on the issues raised in relation to school playgrounds at the pupil conference.

13. School Transport: Redirected Pupils

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the number of pupils unable to be accommodated in their local schools and the associated transport costs for session 1996/97.

On 17 September 1996, the Committee agreed that (a) pupils who have been redirected from their catchment area primary school and for whom a place has not become available by Primary 7 could 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 redirected and the implications in terms of school transport.

During session 1996/97, a total of ten primary age pupils were unable to be accommodated at their local school. Four secondary pupils who were redirected from their local primary school chose to transfer with their peer group to Greenwood Academy at the P7 to S1 transfer. The financial implications of meeting the costs of transport for these redirected pupils amounted to £1,371.00 in 1996/97, and these costs can be accommodated.

The Committee agreed (a) to continue the current policy and procedures in relation to school transport where pupils cannot be accommodated at their local school; and (b) that the situation continue to be monitored and a further report submitted in the event of any substantial increase in costs.

14. Nursery Vouchers: Transitional Arrangements

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the Government's intention to discontinue nursery vouchers from 1998.

Following the announcement by the Government that nursery vouchers will be abolished after the current school session and a new system of funding nursery education is to be put into place by August 1998, a transition arrangement has been established for session 1997/98 whereby there will only be one issue of voucher books to cover the whole year from August 1997 to June 1998. This simplifies the present system, as nurseries will only need to sign once for each child, thus reducing the administrative workload for nursery staff.

Noted.

15. Provision for Visually Impaired Children

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the arrangements for visually impaired children and proposals to improve resources for such children within Irvine Royal Academy.

Most visually impaired children in North Ayrshire are supported within their own local primary and secondary schools, utilising the schools' own resources and resources provided by a variety of centralised services. This arrangement works well for the vast majority of visually impaired children, but for some children the transition from primary to secondary school can create difficulties.

It is proposed that the Council designate a secondary school for visually impaired pupils, with Irvine Royal Academy being the recommended school as in August 1997 a small group of visually impaired pupils are due to commence attending the school which already has ramped access and lifts. The facilities at Irvine Royal Academy would be enhanced in a variety of ways to create a specialist support base with staffing expertise which could be used to support other schools. Irvine Royal Academy would not be promoted as a magnet school for visually impaired pupils, but would give parents additional choice as to whether their children should attend the Academy or their local school. It is hoped that this measure will encourage parents to keep their children at school within North Ayrshire rather than send them to schools with such facilities outwith North Ayrshire.

Assurances were given that all health and safety aspects are being addressed to ensure that children with disabilities can be integrated where appropriate into mainstream schools and that a survey is in place to look at the range of suitable facilities within schools and to identify any deficiencies.

The Committee agreed to approve the development of an enhanced resource for secondary age visually impaired pupils at Irvine Royal Academy.

16. Transport of School Children: 1997/98 Special School and Medical Contracts

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the tenders received in respect of schools transport for children with special needs and for children with medical conditions.

A specification and appropriate guidance notes will be provided to tenderers for such contracts. Processes are in place to deal with issues, such as contracts coming up for renewal throughout the year. Arrangements are also in hand for carrying out inspections on the vehicles being provided.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) that contracts be awarded for 1997/98 as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, including (i) one contract being awarded to a firm who submitted multiple bids who were the lowest overall; and (ii) five contracts being awarded to the firms whose offer was equal lowest with other contractors; and (b) that the three contracts which require to be re-advertised be awarded and reported to the Committee in due course.

17. Surplus Accommodation

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposal to dispose of a house at Kilwinning Academy which is surplus to requirements.

On 6 August 1996, the Committee agreed to dispose of four vacant janitors houses and in the event of further janitorial houses falling vacant, the merits of retaining or disposing of them be considered on an individual basis.

The tenant of the janitorial house at 32b Dalry Road, Kilwinning, which is associated with Kilwinning Academy has applied to purchase the house in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. The tenant carries out janitorial duties for Stanecastle School. There is no interest in occupying the house from janitors assigned to Kilwinning Academy.

The Committee agreed (a) to declare the janitor's house at 32b Dalry Road, Kilwinning surplus to the Education Directorate requirements; (b) to authorise the Legal Services Manager to dispose of the house to the tenant; and (c) to refer the disposal to the Support Services Committee for their information.

18. Further Education in North Ayrshire

Submitted report by the Director of Education on investigations regarding the siting of a Community Learning Centre in Auchenharvie Academy.

On 27 May 1997, the Corporate Strategy Committee noted the position on the progress by James Watt College in pursuing PFI and ERDF funding for the establishment of a North Ayrshire College and the associated Community Learning Centre in the Three Towns. Further details of the proposals for the Community Learning Centre have now been provided which indicate a clear preference, from the college's point of view, for a location in Auchenharvie Academy, Stevenston. The location of the Community Learning Centre at Auchenharvie Academy could be beneficial for the school itself in that the development would reduce the surplus accommodation at the school; would necessitate relocating and refurbishing rooms currently being used by the school, providing students and staff with better facilities; and with the advent of Higher Still in 1999, would provide pupils with extended opportunities for linking with college courses.

The Committee approved the continued investigation of Auchenharvie Academy, Stevenston as a site for a Community Learning Centre, as part of the James Watt College proposals.

19. Early Intervention: Grants Programme

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposal to apply to the Early Intervention Grants Programme.

On 9 May 1997, the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department invited local authorities to submit bids for funding to support schemes designed to improve literacy and numeracy in primary schools. In order to meet the closing date, an application has been submitted, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chairs, subject to final approval by the Committee. The application is for a 3 year scheme which includes resources for additional staffing, training workshops and support for parents. The schools to be involved in the project have been identified through the percentage uptake by pupils of footwear and clothing grants.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the application under the Early Intervention Grants Programme to SOEID; and (b) to note that the outcome of the application will be reported to the Committee in due course.

20. Alternatives to Exclusion: Grants Programme

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposal to apply to the Alternatives to Exclusion Grants Programme.

On 13 May 1997, the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department invited local authorities to submit bids for funding to support schemes designed to explore alternatives to exclusion from school.

In order to meet the closing date, an application has been submitted, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chairs, subject to final approval by the Committee. The application is for a 3 year scheme and includes a proposal to provide Support Bases within secondary schools in North Ayrshire, as an alternative to exclusions and specialised placements in other schools.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the application under the Alternatives to Exclusion Grant Programme to SOEID; and (b) to note that the outcome of the application will be reported to the Committee in due course.

The meeting ended at 3.35 p.m.