

Education Committee  
25 August 1998

**Irvine, 25 August 1998** - 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, Patrick Browne, James Clements, Stewart Dewar, John Donn, Samuel Gooding, Stef Holmer, Father Matthew McManus, Peter McNamara, David Munn, Alan Munro, David O'Neill, Robert Rae, Evelyn Sillars, John Sillars, Gordon Smith, George Steven 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, N. Connaughton, Senior Adviser, E. McLean, Adviser (Education); D. Nibloe, Principal Officer, Accountancy (Financial Services); A. Osborne, Corporate Policy Officer, A. Clarke, Public Relations Assistant and J. Bannatyne, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

**Chair**

Mr. Morris in the Chair.

**Apologies for Absence**

Thomas Dickie.

**1. Minutes Confirmed**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 2 June 1998, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

**2. Triennial Review of Services for Children under Eight**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals to consult widely within North Ayrshire on the draft report on the Triennial Review of Services for Children under Eight.

The Children Act 1989 requires Local Authorities to register and inspect, as appropriate, all daycare services for children under eight years of age and additionally to publish at intervals of three years, a Review of the pattern and range of education daycare and related services for children under the age of eight within its area. This is the third Triennial Review of Services since the implementation of the legislation but it is the first for North Ayrshire Council and it is proposed to undertake a period of extensive consultation, full details of which were provided in the report, prior to the submission of the final Review Document to the Scottish Office later this year.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the proposed consultation arrangements; and (b) that the final document be submitted to the Committee for initial approval.

### **3. New Nursery in Castlepark : Consultation on Name**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a proposal to undertake a consultation exercise with a view to establishing a name for the new nursery which is now operating in Castlepark, Irvine.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve a consultation exercise; and (b) to receive a further report on its outcome.

### **4. Raising Standards: Target Setting**

Submitted report by the Director of Education confirming the progress being made in implementing the Government's Strategy for Raising Standards through Target Setting and enclosing the letter of 29th June 1998 from the Minister for Education and Industry to CoSLA indicating progress nationally.

The provisional targets for improvement which had been set by the HMI Audit Unit for each secondary school in North Ayrshire in relation to SQA Higher and Standard Grade targets were discussed with senior management in each school and final targets for improvement were agreed. Schools have now been using the targets as indicators of where improvements can be achieved and have devised a number of strategies which are the subject of ongoing monitoring through the advisory service e.g. schemes to monitor intensively individual pupils performance and schemes to improve attendance. The target setting initiative is intended to result in higher levels of achievement for individual pupils and, if secondary schools in North Ayrshire achieve their agreed targets over the next 3 years, approximately 350 pupils annually will be obtaining better exam results than would be the case if no improvement were achieved.

Primary and secondary schools in North Ayrshire have also been involved in the initial stages of target setting using 5-14 national tests. The setting of quantitative indicators of achievement for primary and S1 and S2 pupils is a new development in Scottish Education. A census of all North Ayrshire primary and secondary schools to determine patterns of achievement was completed in June 1998 and the results are currently being analysed by SOEID. Some additional discussion will be required before provisional targets are calculated and final targets agreed.

The Committee agreed to receive further reports on the implementation of this initiative.

### **5. Millennium Festival**

Submitted report by the Director of Education providing a detailed summary of proposals to involve North Ayrshire schools in celebrating the Millennium.

Noted.

### **6. Understanding Industry in North Ayrshire Schools**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the Understanding Industry Programme in North Ayrshire Secondary Schools.

This Programme is a UK-wide operation which aims to increase knowledge, enhance skills and improve attitudes towards industry and commerce through the delivery of high quality programmes designed to inform, involve and inspire 16-19 year old students. On a UK-wide basis 3,400 courses were run in the past academic year involving 21,000 workshops delivered mainly by senior managers in industry and commerce. Ayrshire first participated in the Programme five years ago and to date a total of 1,026 North Ayrshire pupils from S5 and S6 have participated and been awarded the nationally recognised Understanding Industry Certificate. During the 1997/98 academic session 286 pupils from the 10 secondary schools in North Ayrshire participated in the Programme and details of an analysis of the views of students obtained before and after the two

day course were given in the report. Further information was provided on the course programme and on the benefits of the Understanding Industry course to students, teachers, schools and local companies.

The Committee agreed to approve continuation of the Understanding Industry Programme in North Ayrshire schools.

## **7. Nursery Education: Support for Voluntary and Private Sector Providers**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the arrangements which have been put in place to commission nursery education places from voluntary and private sector providers.

The Council now has 3 community nurseries, 2 nursery schools and 26 nursery classes providing for 1250 children, mainly in their pre school year. Additionally, 30 voluntary and private sector groups, validated by the Scottish Office, have now returned signed contracts agreeing to the terms and conditions of providing a further 500 places for the Council.

On 24th June 1998, voluntary and private sector providers were invited to a meeting at Greenwood Teachers Centre to discuss the funding arrangements for nursery education for 1998/99 and to receive details on the support services which would be made available to them. The Council will receive £570,000 for the 500 places commissioned from the private and voluntary sector groups. Of this, £452,000 will be paid directly to the providers (£850 for each registered child) and £145,000 will be managed by the Council to provide support services. Under the terms of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1996 the funding is ring fenced for these providers and cannot be retained by the Local Authority for expenditure on its own services. Of the £145,000 for support services, £20,000 will be used for administration, £70,000 for staff development, £25,000 for quality assurance and £30,000 for resources.

The Committee agreed to approve the proposals for support services for the private and voluntary sectors.

## **8. Special Educational Needs in Scotland: Consultation Response**

Submitted report by the Director of Education presenting the Council's response to the Scottish Office Discussion Paper "Special Educational Needs in Scotland" which had invited views on a number of areas relevant to the provision of education for children with special educational needs.

The Council's response, which was shaped by the many comments received from School Boards, educational establishments, senior education staff and Elected Members, had already been forwarded to the Scottish Office to meet their deadline of 7 August 1998 with the proviso that it was subject to Committee approval.

Arising from discussion, concern was expressed over current arrangements within the Education system for the treatment of children with allergies and it was suggested that consideration should be given to the introduction of a central register.

After a full discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to homologate the terms of the response to the Consultation document; and (b) that the Director of Education report back on the issue of arrangements within the authority for children with allergies.

## **9. Classroom Assistant**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposal for a pilot initiative involving the appointment of classroom assistants in North Ayrshire schools, in accordance with the decision of the Committee in June 1998 to accept SOEID's recommendation and allocate £30,000 of New Deal funding towards the project.

The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department has advised local authorities by letter of 15th July 1998 of the Government's plan to extend the classroom assistants programme with a view to employing 5,000 new assistants in Scotland by the year 2002 whose remit and deployment in the primary sector will be determined by Education Authorities.

It is proposed that the following action be taken to implement the pilot programme:-

- Primary Head Teachers should be invited to express interest in participation in the pilot programme;
- A steering group involving Personnel Services, the Departmental JCCs and James Watt College in addition to Education staff should be established;
- Temporary appointments should be made as early as possible in the new school term; and
- A report on the pilot programme should be brought to the Committee together with proposals on how the extended programme should be introduced in North Ayrshire in Session 1999/2000.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to (a) approve these proposals; and (b) ascertain whether any other further education Colleges wished to be represented on the Steering Group for the project.

### **10. Higher Still IT Guidance Requirements**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals for the provision of computers in Secondary Schools in North Ayrshire to provide electronic databases for the gathering, analysis and dissemination of information by guidance staff and pupils.

The Education Committee in April 1998 allocated New Deal funding to address Higher Still guidance requirements in every Secondary School in North Ayrshire. An audit has been undertaken throughout all Secondary Schools to determine the current availability and use of computer equipment. Consequently, it is proposed to provide 2 IBM PC compatible computers and printers for each mainstream Secondary School and one each for James Reid and Stanecastle Special Schools. The Higher Still Development Unit has arranged for all Education authorities to have access to training on the use of PlanIT and Progress databases to ensure that all guidance staff have the necessary IT skills. In addition, the Higher Still Development Unit has distributed free staff development materials for personal and professional development relative to the use of the Internet and the Scottish Council for Educational Technology has also produced a relevant pack on the same subject which will be made available to staff in North Ayrshire schools. Additional support will be offered through the Advisory Service and the Personnel Services Training Department Core Programme.

The Committee agreed to approve the provision of IT support as detailed in the report.

### **11. Early Intervention: Progress Report**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on progress being made in implementing the Early Intervention Programme in literacy and numeracy.

Information for an interim evaluation of the Programme was gathered through a survey of all the school staff involved and through the analysis of assessment results of Primary 1 children, details of which were provided in the report. The staff surveyed identified the deployment of nursery nurses in Primary 1 as the most significant element in the Programme and examples of effective teamwork and positive working relationships were in evidence. Staff identified gains both in their professional and personal development and the comprehensive in-service programme was well received by all staff involved. Schools have used the information from the baseline assessment to target support for learning and give greater focus to forward planning and have reported positively on the impact of the Early Intervention Programme on policy and practice in numerous areas. Early indications suggest that a high percentage of pupils involved in the Programme have made substantial gains in literacy during the course of the first year. The in-service Programme, which will continue for Primary 1 staff, will also be extended in 1998/99 to

include Primary 2 staff and arrangements will be made to include a further group of schools in the Programme. Resources will be extended to include Primary 2 classes and also those Primary schools who are not involved in the Programme.

The Committee agreed to approve the expansion of the Early Intervention Programme to include additional schools.

## **12. Attendance Initiatives**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on various attendance initiatives being supported by New Deal funding in a number of Primary and Secondary schools.

As a result of technological advances Greenwood Academy is giving consideration to the possible use of computerised attendance packages linked by video to individual teacher monitors. Approaches to recognising attendance, which may involve a Certificate for Good Attendance, are being explored by Garnock Primary School, while Largs Academy will include attendance information together with 5-14 attainment to set targets for individual pupils as they progress through S1 and S2 in an effort to raise standards and attainment by pupils prior to reaching S3. With a view to assisting pupils involved in genuine activities outwith school and to discourage truants, a system of passes will also be piloted within Secondary schools.

Noted.

## **13. Information and Communication Technology Enhancements (I.C.T.)**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the steps taken to promote and enhance ICT in schools.

Initiatives undertaken by North Ayrshire schools to pilot the introduction of ICT at local level include the National Grid for Learning, the Scottish Virtual Teachers' Centre, electronic mail in Primary schools and video conferencing. Given that schools will not be able to fully utilise the developments in ICT until a network is created to link computers throughout school buildings, steps have been taken through New Deal funding to begin installing networks in North Ayrshire Secondary schools. Four Primary schools have already been networked and this work is being specified for all new schools initiated through the Capital Programme. A total investment of £226,000 has been made in the schools networked to date. Training and support for teachers is being provided through the Advisory Service of the Education Department together with IT Services and the Personnel Department Training Programme.

Noted.

## **14. Scottish Schools Ethos Network**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the involvement of a number of North Ayrshire Schools in the Scottish Schools Ethos Network.

The Network, which is funded by the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (HMI Audit Unit) and Moray House Institute of Education, was established in 1995 to share good practice and support systematic self-evaluation. The Education Directorate together with 18 individual schools have membership of the Network which involves pupils, parents and school staff consulting and working together to improve schools. Membership entitles schools to four publications of the Ethos Network Newsletter per year together with copies of case studies. Three roadshows are held in different parts of Scotland annually.

The Committee agreed to approve the continued involvement of North Ayrshire schools in the Scottish Schools Ethos Network.

## 15. Behaviour Support and Social Inclusion

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the measures being adopted to improve schools' abilities to meet the needs of troubled and disaffected pupils.

The report identified the current facilities provided in schools to meet the needs of behaviourally challenged pupils. School exclusion levels in North Ayrshire have been traditionally high and, while the new Exclusion Policy introduced in 1997/98 is expected to have a positive impact, significant resources are still required to fund outside placements for such pupils with the annual costs of placements for 27 pupils in specialist independent day schools and a further nine in specialist residential schools amounting to £440,000 and £220,000 respectively. It is therefore intended that an alternative education support base be provided in every Secondary school for such children, to be funded through the New Deal initiative. A standard base would be staffed by two teachers supported by Social Work and Psychological Services and the recruitment process for this initiative has now begun. It is anticipated that every school in North Ayrshire will have a functioning support base before the end of 1998 and a fully established base for the start of the 1999/2000 session. A launch seminar is planned which will involve school representatives, psychologists, specialist staff, Social Workers and other interested parties on the operation of the base and the support required from the various Agencies.

The Committee agreed to approve these measures to implement the initiative.

## 16. The Arran Outdoor Education Resource

Submitted report by the Director of Education on (i) the work of the Arran Outdoor Education Resource during session 1997/98; and (ii) a proposal to revise the charges for attendance at this facility.

The numbers using the resource Centre on Arran have increased from 600 in 1995/96 to 900 in 1997/98 and increased efficiency and effectiveness has been achieved without a significant increase in running costs. A range of courses directly linked to the school curriculum have been developed and the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority has confirmed that the safety procedures employed by the resource are of the highest standard. Although a large number of reservations have been made for courses during 1998/99, suitable residential accommodation remains a problem and efforts are continuing to identify an appropriate site for the development of a self-contained Outdoor Education Centre.

The current charges for courses have not been altered since their introduction in September 1996 and they are therefore lower than the charges levied by similar providers operating elsewhere in Scotland. Accordingly it is proposed that the charges be revised as follows with effect from 1 January 1999:-

	Current Charges	Revised Charge
<b>Pupils from North Ayrshire Schools</b>		
Week Course (4 nights)	£85	£100
Weekend Course (2 nights)	£45	£55
<b>Other Users</b>		
Week Course (4 nights)	£170	£200

Weekend Course (2 nights)	£90	£110
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After a full discussion, the Committee agreed to approve the above revised charges with effect from 1 January 1999.

### **17. Education Department Houses**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals to establish procedures for allocating and reviewing the rents for school houses.

The Council currently owns 12 houses at various locations in North Ayrshire, five of which are within or close to school property and historically occupied by janitors and seven, all on Arran, which are currently occupied by teaching staff. Janitorial houses are allocated as part of the conditions of service for janitors and no change is proposed in this regard. It is proposed to introduce procedures for allocating school properties on Arran which become vacant in the following order of priority:-

a) to a potential member of staff where the appointment would enable a key post within a school to be filled;

b) thereafter, if a house is still available, to the longest waiting member of staff in a relevant post on a list of those seeking school houses to be maintained by the Education Directorate.

In all cases houses would only be occupied by North Ayrshire Council employees and the right to occupy a house will terminate when the relevant post is terminated.

Following discussions with the Estates Section, it is further proposed that the level of rents to be charged for school houses for both janitors and teaching staff be reviewed by the Council on an annual basis.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to approve the proposals for the allocation and annual review of rents for school houses.

### **18. Educational Links with Europe**

Submitted report by the Director of Education giving comprehensive details on a number of further developments which have been initiated in relation to the establishment of European links to further raise the profile of the Council in Europe and advance the study of modern languages.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the proposed expansion of links with Marburg in Germany; (b) to approve the proposed links with Szolnok in Hungary; and (c) to host a proposed visit by Norwegian educationalists in October 1998.

### **19. School Transport: Allocation of Privilege Passes**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals for amendments to the current policy for the allocation of privilege places on school transport based on the recommendations of the review group established in March 1998 to consider school transport issues.

The report outlined the position on the current school transport policy adopted in 1996 whereby free transport is provided where children would require to walk more than one mile at Primary school stages and more than 2 miles at Secondary schools stages. Parents making a placing request for their child to attend a school other than their local school are responsible for any transport arrangements.

After detailed consideration of the various options available the criteria preferred by the

Review Group was that of distance from school and it was proposed that all future applications for privilege places on school transport be prioritised on that basis. It is proposed that the position regarding parents making a placing request for their child to attend a school other than their local school remains unchanged. In special circumstances where Primary and Secondary schoolchildren share transport it is proposed that consideration be given to the pupil who is closest to the Council's criteria for assistance with school transport and then to the younger pupil. Failure to resolve the issue on the basis of these criteria would necessitate recourse to a ballot. It is also proposed that steps be taken to update catchment area information over the coming school session and it will be necessary to have a comprehensive remeasurement of walking distances related to school catchment areas. In the circumstances it is proposed that the move to the use of distance criteria for the allocation of privilege places be implemented on the strength of the existing catchment area information in the meantime.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve a comprehensive re-measurement of walking distances associated with all school catchment areas; and (b) that the allocation of privilege places, where space permits, be prioritised on the basis of distance from the local school.

## **20. Registration Procedures for Childminders and Daycare Provision**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the measures in place to ensure the protection of children in the care of registered childminders or attending registered daycare provision.

The task of registration in relation to childminders and daycare provision is undertaken by a team of pre-school community organisers and there are currently 163 childminders, 21 nurseries, 50 playgroups, 10 playschemes, 2 out of school care clubs and 8 creches. The report gave details of a number of additional duties undertaken by the pre-school community organisers and outlined the main purposes of registration. Detailed information was also provided on the registration procedures currently involved in respect of applications from prospective childminders and daycare facilities.

The Committee agreed to approve the procedures for the registration of childminders and daycare provision.

## **21. Children Educated at Home**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the current arrangements for the monitoring of children who are educated at home. At present 19 children fall into this category compared with a total of 10 in 1997, the increase being largely attributable to two families moving into the area. The procedures agreed by the Education Committee in December 1996 in relation to monitoring the arrangements made for children who are educated at home apply to the great majority of cases where parents have had some previous contact with the school system. However in cases where parents have not previously registered their child in a school within the Authority, they are not subject to these procedures and if the Authority becomes aware that parents are practising home education it is obliged to satisfy itself in terms of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1980, that they are providing an education for the child which is suitable to the child's age, ability and aptitude.

The Committee agreed to remit with powers to the Director of Education to take appropriate action in cases where a child has not previously been registered in one of the Authority's schools.

## **22. Grants to Organisations Supporting the Arts in Schools**

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 final group of awards for 1998/99:-

Keynote Trust	£500
Arran Textiles	£500

### **23. Class Size Reductions**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the receipt of a grant from the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department for the purposes of reducing Primary class sizes.

Formal notification has been received from the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department that the Council has been allocated a grant of £137,650 for 1998/99 towards the reduction in the maximum size of classes in P1 to P3 to 30. Classes in Scottish Primary schools currently have a maximum size of 33 for a single stage class and 25 for a composite class and parents will already have been informed of the proposals for class formation in the coming session. Based on the projected rolls for North Ayrshire Primary schools in session 1998/99 there will be 21 P1-P3 classes of over 30 pupils spread over 10 schools. Since the amendment of P1-P3 classes at this stage of the school year will require careful planning and will require to take account of local circumstances it is proposed that relevant Head Teachers be invited to meet with the Head of Service to draw up plans for expenditure of the grant in the most effective way.

The Committee agreed (a) that consultation take place with Primary Head Teachers regarding the best use of the grant in 1998/99; and (b) to receive further reports from the Director of Education on the steps taken and on plans for future years.

The Meeting ended at 3.50 p.m.