

Education Committee
28 January 1997

Irvine, 28 January 1997 - At a Meeting of the Education Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Thomas Morris, Irene Oldfather, Margaret Highet, Thomas Barr, James Clements, Stewart Dewar, Thomas Dickie, John Donn, Samuel Gooding, Steph Holmer, Father Matthew McManus, Peter McNamara, David Munn, Alan Munro, David O'Neill, Robert Rae, John Sillars, Gordon Smith, George Steven and Reverend John Taylor.

In Attendance

The Director of Education, Brian Gardner, Head of Education Resources, Lesley Rowson, Jim Leckie, Jim Tulips, Heads of Education Services, Rae Duncan, Head of Bilingual Support Service (Education), David Nibloe, Principal Officer Accountancy and Budgeting (Financial Services), Jim Andrew, Principal Officer (Architectural Services) and Sandra Bale, Administration Officer (Chief Executive and Corporate Support Services).

Chair

Mr Morris in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Evelyn Sillars.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 3 December 1996 were confirmed.

2. European Commission Scottish Equality Awards 1996

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the outcome of the European Scottish Equality Awards 1996.

The European Commission makes awards annually to organisations which have achieved outstanding success in the promotion of equality. The main award in the Racial Equality category for 1996 was won by the Council's Bilingual Support Service for its Black and Ethnic Minority Empowerment Project. The Committee viewed a video showing the work of the project. The Bilingual Support Service was also selected for special commendation in the Commission for Racial Equality Local Authority Race Awards for 1996.

The European Commission has also awarded a Certificate of Commendation in the category of Equal Opportunities in Education to West Kilbride Primary School for its initiative addressing perceptions of gender roles.

The Committee, having heard the Head of the Bilingual Support Service respond to questions on the work of the service, agreed to congratulate the Bilingual Support Service and West Kilbride Primary School on the recognition given to their work in relation to equal opportunities.

3. Nursery Education Initiative

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposal to increase nursery provision in the Kilwinning and Irvine areas.

Monitoring of the uptake of nursery places has shown that some parents who have received nursery vouchers have chosen not to use them. At present, 15 parents in the Kilwinning area and 28 parents in the Irvine area have not used their nursery vouchers. It is considered that this is due to there being insufficient provision in these areas. It is proposed therefore to provide two new nursery classes bringing the total number of local authority nursery places in North Ayrshire to 1325.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the proposals for a nursery class at (i) St. Luke's Primary School, Kilwinning for up to 20 places; and (ii) at Stanecastle School, Irvine for up to 20 places, including a number of designated places for children with special needs; and (b) that both classes be included in the Council's nursery enrolment week beginning 24 February 1997.

4. School Exclusions

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the use of exclusions in North Ayrshire schools.

The Review Group established to consider the use of exclusion in North Ayrshire schools has now completed its work and in October a consultation paper prepared by the group was distributed extensively for comment. The consultation paper was widely welcomed and a good response was received, with a number of points emerging including the emphasis on parent partnership, the need for a multi-agency approach and the requirement of schools for support from the Education Authority.

A policy document has been drawn up which emphasises that schools should use exclusion as minimally as possible and provides for a range of options from an initial facility of Agreed Withdrawal (which represent an opportunity to avoid and forestall formal exclusion) to the varying degrees of actual exclusion depending on the severity of the circumstances.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to adopt the policy document on school exclusions; and to implement the proposals, as detailed in the report.

5. School Security

Submitted (a) report by the Director of Education on the outcome of the consultation exercise on school security and (b) proposed school security policy.

The Policy Review Group on School Security, following completion of its review, issued a consultation paper to all educational establishments including the North Ayrshire Council School Boards Forum. All the respondents welcomed the review and the majority of comments supported the various proposals contained in the consultation document.

The proposed policy gives clear guidance on a number of key issues including practical procedures in relation to visitors; entry systems to school buildings; video surveillance systems; training; and future management of school security.

A risk management group will be set up to identify all school requirements and will include the assessment of the video surveillance pilot project. The Review Group will continue to meet also to review progress.

The Scottish Office has indicated that the Secretary of State's forward expenditure plans include £25 million to be distributed over the next 3 financial years with funding being made available to Councils as a specific grant of 75% of the costs, with the Council requiring to

contribute 25%. The grant is likely to be subject to the Secretary of State being satisfied that the authority has prepared a safety strategy and it is therefore proposed that the policy on school security forms the basis of this strategy.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to adopt the proposed policy as the Council's policy on the management of school security.

6. Learning Support Networks

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the structure and functioning of the learning support provision in North Ayrshire schools along with a policy document for future provision.

The Policy Review Group on Learning Support Provision has completed its review and in October 1996 distributed a consultation paper for comment.

The consultation process indicated wide agreement on the principles which should guide the overall support for learning policy, although there were differing opinions in relation to the professional structure and managerial arrangements.

The proposed management structure would comprise a Special Educational Needs/Learning Support Advisor who would have overall responsibility and would report directly to the relevant Head of Service. The present structure of three network Co-ordinators would be reduced to one network Co-ordinator reporting to the Advisor. Consideration would be given to the redeployment of any staff affected and each would be given the opportunity for individual consultation.

The Committee expressed concern over the proposals but assurances were given that the proposals are designed to maximise support in schools, will be of real benefit to children and will address the concerns which have been raised by Head Teachers and other teachers about the existing system. Further assurances were given that written contracts with schools would define the work to be undertaken by learning support staff and that there would be external monitoring and evaluation.

After a full discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to adopt the policy document on learning support provision; and to implement the proposals as detailed in the report; and (b) that a report be submitted to the Committee reviewing the new arrangements following the first year of operation.

7. Bursary Policy - Academic Session 1997/98

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed Further Education and Higher School Bursary Policy for academic session 1997/98.

Local authority bursary policies are normally reviewed on an annual basis to allow any necessary adjustments to be made in the light of changes taking place in vocational education and training. The Council's present policy has proved effective, with few appeals taking place. It is therefore proposed to maintain the Council's existing further education and higher school bursary policy for 1997/98, including the level of allowances and contributions.

The Committee agreed to approve the further education and higher school bursary policy for academic year 1997/98.

8. 5 - 14 Curriculum Development - Reporting to Parents

On 3 December 1996, the Committee agreed to set up a Review Group to look at Reporting to Parents, with the intention of devising a common format for reporting on children's progress in the 5 - 14 curriculum.

Submitted report by the Director of Education detailing the innovative work currently being undertaken by the Garnock cluster of schools in developing a computer generated Report for Parents on aspects of the 5 - 14 Curriculum and confirming that this example of good practice will be considered by the Review Group as part of its investigation.

Noted.

9. Education Capital Building Programme

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals for the Education Capital Programme submission for 1997/98.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve the prioritised list at Appendix 4 attached to the report as the Education Directorate's bid for Capital Funding 1997/98; and (b) to refer the list to the Corporate Strategy Committee for consideration.

10. Scottish Maritime Museum

Submitted report by the Director of Education on discussions with the Scottish Maritime Museum regarding educational activities.

The Scottish Maritime Museum is currently visited by schools parties from North Ayrshire and other areas. In order to attract school visits and enable pupils to achieve the maximum educational benefits from their visits, it is necessary to develop high quality educational materials for their use.

Following discussions with the Maritime Museum, it is proposed to establish an Educational Advisory Group including Education Directorate Advisory staff and staff of the Maritime Museum, to identify areas of educational input to the work of the museum. The Advisory Group will also identify teaching staff to be seconded as Education Officers to produce educational materials for schools. The project will be funded by the Maritime Museum over a period of 3 years with the support of Enterprise Ayrshire.

The Committee agreed (a) to the participation of Education Directorate staff in an Educational Advisory Group with the Scottish Maritime Museum; and (b) to the secondment of appropriate teaching staff to assist in the work of the Maritime Museum.

11. Elected Member/School Board Communications

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals to facilitate communications between school boards and elected members.

On 29 October 1996, the Committee agreed that a short-life Working Group comprising two elected members and two members of the Parental Executive Committee along with the appropriate Head of Service be appointed to draw up a code of practice to cover the relationship between School Board and elected Members including guidelines on issues such as invitations, attendance and communication.

The Working Group has now met and has drawn up proposals which include (a) elected Members having a right to attend and speak at any Board Meeting of any "associated" school; (b) School Boards providing an open invitation to all associated elected Members by informing them in advance of the dates, times and venues of Board proceedings; and (c) holding a seminar for

Members on how School Boards operate.

The Committee agreed to the proposed guidelines as detailed in the report as a basis for regulating communications between School Boards and elected Members.

12. HMI Report: Ardrossan Academy

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the HMI Report on Ardrossan Academy.

Ardrossan Academy was inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in September 1996 as part of a national sample of secondary education. The report by HMI was published on 21 January 1997, identifying a number of strengths of the school and making a number of recommendations.

The key points for action include (a) pupil attainment as a major target for the proposed quality assurance scheme; (b) attainment and quality assurance being included as priorities for development; and (c) further developing the quality assurance system for learning and teaching by involving staff at all levels in the formulation of the system.

The Committee agreed to the proposals as detailed in the report.

13. Land at West Kilbride Primary School

Submitted report by the Director of Education on interest expressed by a company in acquiring a small area of land at West Kilbride Primary School.

It has been confirmed that the area of land is not required for educational purposes and can be declared surplus to requirements.

The Committee agreed (a) to declare this area of ground at West Kilbride Primary School surplus to requirements; and (b) to remit consideration of the matter to the Support Services Committee.

14. Litter Awareness and Prevention Campaign

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals to support the Litter Awareness and Prevention Campaign.

The Council's Litter Awareness and Prevention Campaign is being co-ordinated by the Commercial Services Committee. An Officer Group has been set up, including representatives from the Education Directorate, to progress the campaign. Proposals have been drawn up to promote the litter awareness campaign throughout all North Ayrshire Schools. Provision has been made in the Education Directorate budget for the total estimated costs of £550.00 for curriculum materials and for promoting the campaign in schools.

The Committee agreed to approve the terms of the report.

15. Travel Arrangements for Skelmorlie Pupils

Submitted report by the Director of Education on transport arrangements for Roman Catholic children living in the village of Skelmorlie.

On 3 December 1996, the Committee agreed to the creation of delineated areas for each secondary school by the aggregation of the existing catchment areas of the associated primary schools. The Committee also agreed that the Director of Education submit a report on transport arrangements for Roman Catholic children living in Skelmorlie. Whilst the delineated area for St. Andrews Academy, Saltcoats includes the catchment area of Skelmorlie Primary School, in practice most children have transferred to St. Columba's High School, Gourock without placing

requests and with transport being provided. This has been the case for at least the last 20 years and the cost of continuing this service would be approximately £2,800.00.

The Committee agreed that, due to the exceptional circumstances, in this case transport be provided for Roman Catholic children who live within the catchment area of Skelmorlie Primary School to attend St. Columba's High School, Gourrock, should they be successful in obtaining a place through making a placing request.

The meeting ended at 3.30 p.m.