

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 9 June 2016.

Present:

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| Councillor Elaine Green (Chair), | Councillor Gordon McCaskill |
| Councillor Paul O’Kane (Vice Chair), | Councillor Ian McAlpine |
| Councillor Jim Fletcher (Leader) | Councillor Jim Swift |
| Councillor Tony Buchanan | Councillor Vincent Waters |
| Councillor Charlie Gilbert | Reverend Thomas Boyle |
| Councillor Alan Lafferty | |

Councillor Green in the Chair

Attending:

Mhairi Shaw, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Fiona Morrison, Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources); Mark Ratter, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance); Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager; and Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies:

Councillor Mary Montague; Dr Frank Angell; Ms Mary McIntyre; and Mr Alan Munro.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2065. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

OPENING REMARKS

2066. On behalf of the committee, Councillor Green extended her sympathies to Councillor Montague following her recent bereavement.

ADVANCING EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION IN EAST RENFREWSHIRE

2067. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval for the department's approach to raising attainment and achievement for all learners in East Renfrewshire.

The report explained that the strategy, Advancing Excellence and Equity in Education in East Renfrewshire, was the department's response to the Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework (NIF) published in January 2016. The strategy looked to build on the strengths of the systems that had served learners well in the past as well as making changes only where and when it was considered appropriate to do so to continue to consistently achieve the highest possible standards in all of the department's schools and services. The strategy set out an overview of how the department had performed to date in achieving its vision of "Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving through Excellent Experiences" and outlined the case for future improvement for a range of different learners and the steps which would be taken to tackle the equity issues which needed to be addressed to bring about the desired improvements in outcomes.

A range of measures which would be used to evaluate progress was set out in the report and these reflected the measures set out in the NIF which would allow the department to meet the demands of reporting to the Scottish Government. The report concluded by explaining that regular reports would continue to be brought to the committee through the department's regular annual presentations on attainment and achievement and through the annual Standards and Quality Report as well as a new annual report on the impact of the strategy.

Responding to comments from members regarding how disadvantaged groups would be identified, the Director of Education explained that an action research approach had been adopted which supported staff to participate in professional enquiry to allow them to build their own skills and knowledge to test change with individuals or groups to find out what worked for them. School Improvement Partnerships (SIPs) had been established to work closely with the Educational Psychology Service to determine individual approaches tailored to particular situations and schools were also being supported by an Attainment Advisor from Education Scotland. She also reminded the committee that schools had benefitted from additional teaching staff over the past few years as a result of the Council's allocation of additional funds to support the lowest performing 20% of learners.

The Director went on to explain, in response to a comment regarding the apparent difference in perception between the east and west sides of the Council area regarding the availability of sports and leisure facilities and youth groups in each area, that a meeting had been arranged with representatives of East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure and voluntary groups to look at the need to tailor the available offerings to particular groups of young people and how best to publicise these to increase participation. She concluded by reiterating that the department's strategy aimed to increase attainment levels for all learners and there was clear evidence that within East Renfrewshire the improvement in attainment as shown by the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) Average Total Cumulative Insight Points: By SIMD measure showed the greatest improvement for those in Deciles 1 – 3.

Following further brief discussion, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) approve the department's strategy Advancing Excellence and Equity in Education in East Renfrewshire; and

- (b) instruct the Director of Education to implement the strategy and regularly report on the progress of its implementation.

STANDARD CIRCULAR NO. 5 – ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL

2068. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval for departmental guidance to schools on recording and reporting on attendance at school.

The report explained that attendance at school in East Renfrewshire was exceptional and that attendance and taking part in learning was fundamental to making sure that young people became successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

It continued by explaining that young people were now learning in a variety of settings, gaining specific support for learning, accessing learning provided by other agencies or providers in partnership with schools and being absent from school when, for example, representing their club or country in a sporting event.

The draft Standard Circular No.5 allowed all schools to be able to account for all of these situations and ensured that attendance was being consistently and accurately recorded across all establishments. The circular set out guidance for staff advising them on a number of matters including, amongst others, hours of attendance; exemption from attendance; and alerting schools and parents about non-attendance.

Responding to Councillor McCaskill who suggested that the classification of “unauthorised absence” in relation to family holidays taken during term time should be removed in order to avoid punishing parents, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that the classification criteria were prescribed by the Scottish Government and there was no room for local discretion in this regard. She also explained that she was unaware of any proposal to fine parents for removing children for holidays during term time as currently happens in England. The Director of Education explained that the department tried to accommodate exceptional situations, citing as an example the cancellation of leave for police officers at the time of the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

Referring to the situation of a young person representing their school at a sporting event and being recorded as “other authorised absence” which would result in their overall attendance figure decreasing, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that the Council would continue to support and encourage all children and young people to be actively engaged in a wide range of activities, arranged by schools or otherwise, which furthered their development in line with the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence but that the guidance on approved non-school organised events was clear.

The committee agreed to:-

- (a) note the Revised Standard Circular No. 5 and the comments made; and
- (b) instruct the Director of Education to take the necessary steps to ensure its implementation in all schools.

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE AWARD

2069. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education advising of the outcome of the most recent Customer Service Excellence assessment for the Education Department.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that the assessment had been conducted in two stages, the first being a review of the self-assessment submission and the second involving a review of the actual service delivered in schools by the Educational Psychology Service. The second stage had followed two customer journeys and included interviews with parents, teachers, head teachers, support staff and psychologists.

The report recognised the department's continuing commitment to providing excellent services and to seeking continuous improvement. It identified ten areas of "Compliance Plus" described as "*behaviours or practices which exceed the requirements of the standard and are viewed as exceptional or as an exemplar to others*". These included very high levels of customer insight used effectively to develop services; commitment to putting customers at the heart of service delivery; staff awareness of customers' needs and preferences; partnership working to meet customer needs; and family friendly accreditation.

It identified one area of improvement and asked the department to consider making the Educational Psychology Service's useful information videos available on any device when outside the Education Department.

Following brief discussion the committee:-

- (a) noted the continuing high standard of the award in recognition of the department's high quality services; and
- (b) approved the approach to ensuring the department's sustained commitment to continuous improvement.

MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF MADRAS FAMILY CENTRE AND NEILSTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

2070. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education informing members of the need and intention to introduce a joint management team for Madras Family Centre and Neilston Primary School.

The report explained that the Council had previously identified the need for investment in both Neilston and St Thomas' Primary Schools including the feasibility of a shared campus which would include the local library and swimming pool. In the event of resources becoming available it would be prudent to include Madras Family Centre in any proposed renewal of the Council estate within Neilston.

The Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources) explained that there was national concern regarding the recruitment and appointment of suitably qualified and experienced head teachers in both primary and early years establishments. She went on to outline the benefits to be gained by placing Madras Family Centre and Neilston Primary School within a Joint Headship Management Team structure. These included making the post more attractive to potential candidates; the creation of a new Principal Teacher post for the nursery; greater professional learning opportunities for all staff across both

establishments; better outcomes for all learners; enhancing the learning experience of all children in their pre-school and early primary years; and greater and sustained parental involvement. She concluded by explaining that Madras Family Centre and Neilston Primary School would remain as separate establishments in their own right but that the strategic direction would be managed by the Joint Headship Management Team.

Responding to comments from members regarding recruitment difficulties referred to in the report, the Director of Education explained that this referred specifically to head teacher posts but that Mrs Morton had arranged a recruitment exercise which has put the Council and its schools in a good position to ensure that adequate numbers of teachers were recruited to maintain the agreed ratios, as per the conditions of the grant settlement from the Scottish Government. The Education Senior Manager further explained that while the Council was unable to offer any financial incentives in order to recruit head teachers as remuneration was governed by national policies and guidelines, the department was being proactive in establishing an in-house training and support programme with a view to preparing depute head teachers to make the step up to head teacher. The Director of Education emphasised that this solution was particular to Neilston Primary and Madras Family Centre and was not being put in place to set a precedent for other schools in the authority.

Following further discussion, in the course of which a number of members welcomed the commitment to further investment in the school estate within Neilston as resources became available, the committee agreed to note:-

- (a) the Director of Education's intention to place the management of Madras Family Centre and Neilston Primary School under the leadership of a Joint Headship Management Team; and
- (b) that this arrangement would be specific to Madras Family Centre and Neilston Primary School.

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE IN EAST RENFREWSHIRE SCHOOLS

2071. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education informing members of the outcome of the recent review of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in East Renfrewshire schools.

The report explained that the purpose of the review had been to establish the effectiveness of the leadership of CfE and the impact of CfE on the experiences, attainment and achievement of learners in the Broad General Education (BGE) in East Renfrewshire schools and early years establishments.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that the report showed a very positive picture. Key strengths highlighted included highly effective leadership at all levels; staff and pupils sharing a common language of learning; high and improving levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics; and excellent support for pupils. An action plan had been developed to address a number of recommendations for improvement in the key areas of leadership of learning, curriculum and attainment and achievement and the findings had been shared with head teachers.

He concluded by explaining that the CfE action plan along with the department's Local Improvement Plan and the strategy Advancing Equity and Excellence in Education would ensure that the department continued to deliver its vision of "Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving through Excellent Experiences" over the next five years.

Responding to comments from members regarding the threat of industrial action by teachers in respect of increased workload as a result of CfE, the Director of Education explained that the department had been working closely with the teaching unions through the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNCT) on the issue of teachers' workload over a number of years and would continue to do so. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) was also working to address workload issues and it was anticipated that the position on possible industrial action would become clearer following the forthcoming AGM of the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS).

Councillor Swift sought further information regarding how it was anticipated that the actions contained in the action plan would be measured. In response, the Head of Education Services (Quality and Performance) explained that it was crucial to constantly monitor and evaluate any evidence of improvement through a variety of measures as shown on the action plan and that further external scrutiny was also undertaken through reviews and inspections conducted by Education Scotland.

The Director concluded by explaining that the department had previously taken a view on when was the best time to introduce the changes required by CfE including the introduction of National 4 and 5 examinations and that the subsequent decision to delay their introduction in order to allow pupils and schools to fully prepare for the change had been vindicated by the best ever S4 and S5 results achieved in the 2014/15 SQA diet with further improvements anticipated in 2015/16.

Thereafter the committee agreed to:-

- (a) note the content of the CfE report in East Renfrewshire Schools and the comments made; and
- (b) approve the authority's action plan to address the agreed recommendations for improvement.

NAME OF THE NEW DENOMINATIONAL PRIMARY SCHOOL IN NEWTON MEARNES

2072. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking agreement on a name for the new denominational primary school in Newton Mearns.

The report explained that the committee had previously approved a recommendation for the Director of Education to agree with the Catholic Church and pupils of St Cadoc's Primary School the name of the new denominational school and to report the final choice to the committee.

It had been agreed with Bishop Keenan, Bishop of the Diocese of Paisley, that pupils would suggest a number of names for consideration by the whole school. Thereafter, children would be asked to investigate each saint and then vote and make a suggestion to the Bishop for his consideration. The Pupil Council had chosen four names and, following a vote, the most popular choice had been St Clare with 287 votes. The Head Teacher and Pupil Council had then written to the Bishop informing him of the outcome and the Bishop

had confirmed to the Director that in his view the new school should be named St Clare's Primary School.

Following brief discussion the committee agreed to the name of St. Clare's Primary School.

DENOMINATIONAL (CATHOLIC) SCHOOL PLACES IN THE EAST OF THE AUTHORITY AREA

2073. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education appraising members of the pressure on denominational (Catholic) places in the east of the Council area and the proposed next steps.

The report explained that the Council was required to provide sufficient school places for its resident population and that all public schools had to be open to pupils of all denominations and must provide a Catholic education to anyone who requested it. In managing provision to date the Council had adopted a "cross sector" policy which required parents or carers to commit to the denominational or non-denominational sector on entry to the primary stage and thereafter submit a placing request in the event that they wished to change sector. It also explained that under the terms of guidance code associated with the Equality Act 2010 the "only area where education authorities can discriminate on religious grounds in relation to pupil admission is in their criteria for accepting placing requests".

The report went on to explain that the Council had responded to new housebuilding in the east of the area by extending existing schools and building new school provision to meet the resulting increased demand for places. The Council had also managed its school provision by consulting on and subsequently adopting revised admission arrangements for St Ninian's High School in 2010/11. However, continued housebuilding had resulted in further increased pupil numbers especially in the Catholic sector where numbers had increased by over 20% compared to just over 6% in the non-denominational sector.

The report concluded by explaining that the Director had asked officers to undertake further analysis to better understand the increase in the number of pupils attending denominational schools and to explore options to satisfy local demand taking account of relevant and appropriate legislation as well as the effective and efficient management of resources. Any option put forward for consideration had to provide the Council with the ability to offer a denominational education to any family requesting that and also to plan effectively and manage pupil places across the school estate. The Director would consult with the Catholic Church regarding proposed future options.

Reverend Boyle, whilst welcoming the report, reiterated the view of the Catholic Church that Catholic schools were for Catholic pupils and that the guidance issued by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission in respect of the prioritisation of places had yet to be tested in court. Councillor Fletcher explained that the future availability of denominational places was raised frequently by parents at OLM Primary School and by the Parent Council at St Ninian's High School and that the Council had a proven track record in accommodating parental wishes. However, he cautioned that this might not always be possible in future noting that other education authorities had adopted different policies in this respect.

Responding to comments from members relating to the supply of denominational places within the secondary sector relative to the increased demand likely to arise from the designation of sites for further housebuilding contained in the Local Development Plan (LDP), the Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources) explained the complexity of the issue of forecasting future demand and that the Council would continue to take a

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prudent approach including consideration of the impact of new housing across the denominational estate in line with the LDP as part of the ongoing analysis to inform the report to be brought to the committee by the Director of Education in August.

She went on to explain, in response to comments relating to the number of pupils in St Ninian's High School who were not resident within the school's current catchment area, that the numbers were highest in the senior phase as a result of the changes made in 2010/11 and that overall numbers of successful placing requests were expected to continue to reduce. She concluded by explaining that the department was working closely with other Council departments in seeking to understand the complexity of the situation and that it would continue to work closely with parents and the Catholic Church to develop a range of options to bring to the committee for consideration.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) note the pressure on denominational (Catholic) places in the east of the Council area; and
- (b) instruct the Director of Education to bring a further report to the committee in August 2016 to consider options for the management of denominational places, including, where necessary, the need to carry out a formal education consultation.

VALEDICTORY REMARKS – REVEREND THOMAS BOYLE

2074. Councillor Green informed the committee that this would be Reverend Boyle's last meeting as the representative of the Catholic Church. She thanked him for his contribution to the Short Life Working Group on St Ninian's High School and to the committee over two periods of membership, the latest being since 2010. On behalf of the committee she offered Reverend Boyle her best wishes for the future.

Having heard a number of members express their thanks for his contribution to the work of the committee, Reverend Boyle responded in appropriate terms and expressed the view that the high standard of education within East Renfrewshire was as a result of the commitment of the members of the committee to work together for the benefit of the children and young people of East Renfrewshire and the professionalism of the Directorate and staff of the Education Department. He wished the committee well for the future.

CHAIR