

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 19 November 2015.

Present:

Councillor Elaine Green (Chair)	Councillor Alan Lafferty
Councillor Paul O’Kane (Vice Chair)	Councillor Ian McAlpine
Councillor Jim Fletcher (Leader)	Councillor Gordon McCaskill
Councillor Tony Buchanan	Councillor Mary Montague
Councillor Danny Devlin	Dr Frank Angell
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	Ms Mary McIntyre

Councillor Green in the Chair

Attending:

Mhairi Shaw, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Mark Ratter, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance); Phil Daws; Head of Housing and Property Services, Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager; Raymond O’Kane, Technical Services Manager; and Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer

Also attending:

Kacie Gray and Kyle Hind, pupils, and Vivien Mitchell, Depute Head Teacher, Cross Arthurlie Primary School

Apologies:

Councillors Jim Swift and Vincent Waters and Mr Alan Munro.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1805. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

PRESENTATION TO KACIE GRAY AND KYLE HIND, CROSS ARTHURLIE PRIMARY SCHOOL

1806. Councillor Green welcomed to the meeting Kacie Gray and Kyle Hind, P5 pupils of Cross Arthurlie Primary School.

Councillor Green explained that both pupils had achieved success in a national competition entitled "The Next Big Idea" organised by the Community Resources Network Scotland (CRNS), the purpose of which was to encourage young people to think about ways in which everyone could work towards a "zero waste" society and to think of an idea similar to the previous winner which was to charge for plastic bags in shops. Kacie and Kyle's idea related to the sale of toiletries in reusable containers which could be refilled in-store from a dispenser. They had also had an idea to reduce the amount of packaging used in food sales in order to reduce the volume of waste and the number of trucks and other forms of transport required to transport these goods to supermarkets and shops.

Kacie and Kyle had attended an awards ceremony at The Scottish Parliament on 6 November at which they had shared their ideas with members of the CRNS and been presented with an award of £500 for the school.

On behalf of the Council, Councillor Green presented both pupils with a selection of gifts in recognition of their success.

CART MILL FAMILY CENTRE

1807. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 11 June 2015 (Page 1497, Item 1593 refers) when it had been noted that planning permission for the proposed new family centre in the Clarkston/Busby area had been refused, the committee considered a report by the Director of Education and the Director of Environment providing an update on the current position regarding Cart Mill Family Centre and its proposed permanent site.

The Head of Housing and Property Services explained that following the refusal of planning permission, officers had reviewed the options available including the possibility of appealing the decision. However, in the circumstances it had been decided to commission additional studies to inform the future strategy for the delivery of a permanent site for the new family centre. Officers from the Environment Department had subsequently undertaken a review of an alternative design and access put forward by residents, and commissioned both an ecology report for the site and an addendum to the transport assessment previously carried out. Specifically, the external transport consultants had been asked to carry out an appraisal of the original and alternative proposed access options.

He went on to explain that the ecology report had found no significant ecology issues on site which would prevent either design from progressing. Design work carried out by Property and Technical Services (PaTS) had established that there would be significant additional costs (approximately £400,000 and possibly substantially more) on top of an estimated total original cost of £1.556m as a result of further design work and associated programme delay implications related to the revised access put forward by residents. The additional works carried out by the external transport consultants found in any event that the original access solution scored better than the alternative design put forward by residents mainly due to the risk associated with the alternative design.

Taking all of these findings into account, it had been concluded by officers that the original design and access was the preferred option for the new family centre. Accordingly, the planning application had been re-submitted and would be considered by the Planning Applications Committee in December 2015. If approved at that meeting, it would be possible for the new family centre to be constructed and open for the start of the new school year in August 2016.

In the event of the Planning Applications Committee refusing the re-submitted planning application, there would be further costs, including the ongoing cost of leasing the temporary accommodation presently being used to house the family centre, and project delays. Any further delay to the project would mean that the family centre would not be able to open in time for the start of the new school year in August 2016.

Responding to comments from members regarding the resubmitted planning application, the Head of Housing and Property Services, supported by the Director of Education, explained that full details regarding further information resulting from the additional work carried out by PaTS and the external consultants, would be made available to members of the Planning Applications Committee and would be in the public domain prior to the meeting in December. He also explained that there had been a number of meetings and written exchanges between officers and local residents. However, following detailed re-examination of the original proposal and taking account of the additional information provided, with particular emphasis on the access arrangements, officers had concluded that the original proposal still offered the best option for the development. He concluded by expressing the view that the level of detail contained in the submission by the residents did not stand up to comparison with that provided by PaTS and the independent consultants and therefore could not be relied upon.

The Director of Education explained that the independent transport consultants who had carried out the appraisal of the access options put forward by residents had been the same ones who had conducted the assessment at Braidbar Primary School prior to the establishment of the nursery class there and that since the opening of that nursery no complaints had been received in relation to access or transport problems.

Councillor Buchanan expressed the view that the whole community wanted to see the new family centre completed but that the matter of access was a concern to local residents. He questioned whether the concerns raised by residents been appropriately and robustly addressed prior to the resubmission of the planning application and explained that the report to the Planning Applications Committee had to be absolutely clear on the reasons for deciding on the original access.

Councillor Fletcher expressed his disappointment at the decision of the Planning Applications Committee to refuse planning permission for the new centre and at the support voiced by the local MP and some MSPs in support of the decision pointing out that early years provision was a high priority policy of the Scottish Government. He went on to explain that the Council had made available, through its capital programme, additional funding to allow the proposed development to proceed in spite of the constraints being placed on its budget. He joined with other members in expressing the view that it was essential that the Planning Applications Committee had available to it all of the information required to enable it to make an informed and transparent decision and that all of the figures and arguments quoted required to be robust enough to stand up to any scrutiny. He concluded by expressing the view that the Council must take every opportunity to stress the very positive outcomes afforded by this development in terms of the importance of early learning and childcare in the future life chances of children.

Following further brief discussion, in the course of which further clarification was given regarding the additional costs which would be incurred in the event of a further refusal of planning permission and the contingencies available to the Council in the event of such a refusal, the committee agreed to note the report.

PROPOSED CONSULTATION ON THE CONTINUED IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ENTITLEMENT TO 600 HOURS OF EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

1808. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 3 October 2013 (Page 695, Item 738 refers), when it had been agreed, from August 2015, to introduce some flexibility for parents to access the proposed additional 30 hours of early learning and childcare to address parental needs in addition to the previous provision of 570 hours, the committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval to consult with parents of children under 5 years of age to review and determine a model for the delivery of 600 hours of early learning and childcare in East Renfrewshire from autumn 2017.

The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 required local authorities to consult on early learning and childcare every 2 years and to build, year on year, more flexible models of provision through reconfiguration of services. She went on to explain that the consultation document, a copy of which was appended to the report, would be made available to parents of children under 5 years of age by means of an online questionnaire on the Council's Citizen's Space. The consultation would last from January to April 2016 with articles in the local media and school and nursery newsletters, posters in nurseries, playgroups, libraries, doctor's surgeries and the Council's social media sites to encourage parental participation. Responses would be collated and reported to a future meeting of the committee in October 2016 in readiness for the allocation of places in 2017 with any new arrangements taking effect from autumn 2017. She concluded by explaining that East Renfrewshire was one of only two councils in Scotland to deliver 570 hours to all prescribed preschool children prior to the increase, that draft statutory guidance had been published to accompany the Act, and that the provision of affordable early learning and childcare formed a major part of the Council's strategy to tackle inequality.

Responding to comments from members regarding additional funding to support the stated ambition of the Scottish Government to incrementally increase the level of early learning and childcare to 1140 hours for each child, the Director of Education explained that it was anticipated that additional funding would be made available to the Council to support any future model of delivery to achieve this ambitious target but to date no information had been received from the Scottish Government regarding the funding settlement for local government in 2016/17 and beyond. As soon as this information was available it would be brought to the committee.

Having heard Councillor Fletcher, supported by others, highlight the importance of the proposed consultation in supporting the Council's efforts to implement a flagship policy of the Scottish Government, emphasise the need to provide affordable early learning and childcare which was a major expense for working parents, and express the hope that the anticipated level of funding would be forthcoming, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) approve that the Director of Education proceed with a consultation exercise; and,
- (b) instruct the Director to report on the findings of the consultation and, depending on the outcome, bring forward a revised model for East Renfrewshire to a future meeting of the committee in October 2016.

CONSULTATION ON COMPLAINTS CONCERNING FUNCTIONS RELATING TO THE NAMED PERSON AND CHILD'S PLAN AS CONTAINED IN THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (SCOTLAND) ACT 2014

1809. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education informing members on the joint response by the Education Department and the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) to the Scottish Government Consultation on Complaints Concerning Functions Relating to the Named Person and Child's Plan as contained in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Copies of the consultation document and the joint response were appended to the report.

The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that the Act intended to give every parent and child the right and confidence to complain in the event that they felt that something was unsatisfactory or unacceptable. The consultation had set out two options for the management of complaints. Option 1 reflected existing complaints mechanisms whereby parents and children would make separate complaints to the organisation or body involved in the complaint. Option 2 looked to ensure that there was a co-ordinated, holistic approach taken to the investigation of complaints through a single point of contact. She went on to explain that the Education Department and HSCP response had indicated a preference for Option 1 and continued by highlighting the perceived advantages of Option 1 and the disadvantages of Option 2.

In response to a comment from Councillor McCaskill that neither option appeared to be totally satisfactory, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that there had been no provision in the consultation document to put forward any alternative options for consideration.

The committee agreed to note the content of the joint response by the Education Department and the HSCP to the Scottish Government Consultation on Complaints Concerning Functions Relating to the Named Person and Child's Plan as contained in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT NATIONAL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

1810. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 8 October 2015 (Page 1648, Item 1757 refers) when it had been reported that the Council's response to the Scottish Government's draft national improvement plan for education was still being formulated and that a report would be presented to the committee in due course, the committee considered a report by the Director of Education providing an update on the Education Department's response to the Scottish Government's draft National Improvement Framework (NIF). A copy of the draft NIF accompanied the report (Appendix 1).

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that the overarching objective of the NIF was to improve outcomes for all learners by bringing together key information to evaluate performance and to direct vision and priorities. The NIF included six drivers of performance namely, school improvement; school leadership; teacher professionalism; assessment of children's progress; parental involvement; and performance information.

Responding to comments from members, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that the current inspection process conducted by Education Scotland was under review and that the department welcomed the introduction of

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a standardised assessment tool which would provide stakeholders with nationally comparable data at pupil, school, local authority and national level to complement the data currently collected locally.

The Director of Education explained that whilst East Renfrewshire was considered to be well placed to implement the proposed framework, the department had expressed considerable concern at the proposed timescale for the introduction of the new standardised assessment tool and that this was being pursued through a number of forums including COSLA and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES).

The committee agreed to note the Education Department's response to the consultation.

CHAIR