

**MINUTE**  
**of**  
**EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**Minute of meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 17 November 2022.**

**Present:**

Councillor Andrew Anderson (Chair)  
Councillor Tony Buchanan  
Councillor Kate Campbell  
Councillor Danny Devlin  
Councillor Colm Merrick (\*)  
Councillor Owen O'Donnell

Councillor Katie Pragnell (Vice Chair) (\*)  
Councillor Gordon Wallace  
Dr Frank Angell (\*)  
Ms Fiona Gilchrist  
Ms Dorothy Graham  
Mr Des Morris

Councillor Anderson in the Chair

(\*) indicates remote attendance

**Attending:**

Mark Ratter, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement); Joe McCaig, Head of Education Services (Performance and Provision); Siobhan McColgan, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Graeme Hay, Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change); Jennifer Graham, Committee Services Officer; and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**233.** There were no declarations of interest intimated.

**RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATION ON THE PROVISION OF EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE**

**234.** The committee considered a report by the Director of Education advising of the biennial consultation on the provision of early learning and childcare within East Renfrewshire and setting out the proposals to increase flexibility through the available models of provision in early learning and childcare settings from August 2023.

It was reported that all three and four year old children, and eligible two year olds, had been offered 1140 hours of funded provision each year since August 2020, a year ahead of the national implementation date, and a range of different models were currently available for families to choose from to best suit their own specific circumstances. Families could choose to use their child's entitlement in a local authority setting, from a funded provider or "blended provision" from both.

An online consultation exercise on the provision of early learning and childcare was undertaken in October 2022 and a number of key points were noted including that 81% of children between 3 and 5 years old were accessing their statutory entitlement; a higher number of respondents (53%) indicated that setting was the most important aspect of their child's allocation; and a significant number of those responding (73%) indicated that they would like to consider the option to purchase additional hours above the statutory entitlement.

The Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change) was heard further regarding the report, advising that new legislation being introduced from August 2023 would allow parents deferring their child's entry to primary school if they were not yet 5 years old, to access funded early learning and childcare for an additional year. When asked about the likelihood of deferral, 20% had indicated that they were likely to do so, and the department was making appropriate arrangements to ensure sufficient capacity across all communities in readiness for the new entitlement. He also referred to the request from families, through the consultation, to have a greater availability of additional hours above the statutory requirement and, from session 2023/24, it was expected that families would be able to apply to access a new "full time" model of provision by purchasing additional hours.

In response to concerns expressed by Councillors Wallace and Anderson in relation to a recent application which had been submitted to the Planning Applications Committee, when it was reported that educational establishments in some parts of the authority were at full capacity and had no scope for additional provision, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) advised that early years was a full year service and the flexibility provided within this service came from having more scope in their provision models than schools. In particular the efficiency in early years with most models meant that 2 children could receive their full entitlement using just one space. The Education Department also worked with funded providers who also offer the entitlement, therefore capacity was greater than that of schools.

Thereafter the Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change), in response to questions from Councillor O'Donnell, advised that almost all 3-5 year olds currently accessed their places but this figure was significantly lower for eligible 2-3 year olds. Data which was due to be shared by the Department of Work and Pensions in the next few months should assist with targeting families entitled to this provision to increase uptake of places. He added that deferrals had already been identified as a spending pressure within projected budgets as the level of demand was unknown due to the introduction of new legislation from August 2023. The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) added that deferrals could be scattered across the catchment area and would be included in the P1 enrolment programme to allow this provision to be taken into account when allocating places for 2023/24. Additional places could be purchased, which would lead to income generation, but this would depend on space being available to offer that provision. She referred to the expansion of education establishments, which had been funded through the Council's capital programme, but added that the revenue gap continued to increase. The funding model for next year was awaited and it was hoped that this would address the funding gap. She confirmed that the current gap of £1.2million excluded deferrals at this stage.

In response to further questions, the Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change) confirmed that 94% of families received their first choice of setting, which were organised in communities, and those who wished to purchase additional hours did so for a number of reasons including full time working; studying; and training.

Having heard Members commend the work of the Education Department in this area, the committee noted:-

- (a) the results of the early learning and childcare consultation; and
- (b) the department's proposals to further increase flexibility for families to address additional demand.

## PROGRESS REPORT ON PRIORITIES ASSOCIATED WITH NATIONAL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

**235.** The committee considered a report by the Director of Education providing an update on the Education Department's progress implementing priorities associated with the National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education (NIF).

It was reported that the National Improvement Framework (NIF) had been launched by the Scottish Government in 2016, based on 4 key priorities of improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy; closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people; improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing; and improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people. In December 2021, a fifth key priority of placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education, was included in the document *Education – Achieving Excellence and Equity: national improvement framework and improvement plan 2022*. The report being presented to the committee focussed on the original 4 key priorities as it related to the progress made during session 2021-22, but it was highlighted that key priority 5 had been included in the Local Improvement Plan 2022-25 and would be considered in next year's report.

The report outlined that the NIF was underpinned by a series of planning and reporting duties designed to support transparency and accountability; referred to the department Strategic Equity Fund Plan (SEF) which was designed to tackle inequity and inequalities in education outcomes; and highlighted that the annual Standards and Quality Report provided evidence of how the department and schools made every effort to raise the bar for all learners whilst reducing inequalities.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) advised that, although local authorities were not required to report to the Scottish Government this year on the themes of inequity and inequality as a result of the ongoing challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, East Renfrewshire was able to evaluate the impact of its commitment to supporting children, families and the school community due to a high level, evidence-based internal quality assurance by schools and the department. Progress was evaluated annually to identify strengths in current provision and areas where further improvement was required and evidence was gathered through a range of activities. A high level summary of the progress in East Renfrewshire was provided and it was reported that the introduction of SEF would enable further opportunities for the department and schools to explore how to support children and young people with their wellbeing and learning.

In response to questions, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) advised that a higher decrease in reading, writing, talking and listening figures amongst primary school children, when compared to numeracy figures, could be as a result of younger people missing out on social interaction during the pandemic, which seemed to affect primary school children more than those of secondary school age. It was expected that these figures would improve now that pupils had returned to school, and literacy principal teachers would focus on the reasons for the decrease and ways to improve the attainment figures in this area.

The Head of Education Services (Performance and Provision) added that, although the main statutory focus for schools was to improve the poverty related attainment gap, the expectation was that schools would also look at other equality areas including in relation to additional support needs, gender and ethnicity, within their own school environment.

Thereafter, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) advised that work was ongoing to assist families in reducing the cost of the school day including by having accessible school clothing banks, and subsidising trips and excursions through Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). Provision of assistance for pupils in SIMD 1 & 2 was detailed in the SEF plan submitted

to the committee in August 2022 and included assisting pupils with literacy and numeracy; targeting attendance at school; and reaching pupils who required a different approach to learning.

Thereafter, the committee noted the Education Department's progress in implementing priorities associated with the National Improvement Framework.

### **SCOTTISH ATTAINMENT CHALLENGE STRETCH AIMS**

**236.** Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 25 August 2022 (Page 130, Item 95 refers), when it was agreed that a report including the Strategic Equity Funding (SEF) plan targets would be submitted to the Education Committee in November 2022, the committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval for the proposed Scottish Attainment Challenge Stretch Aims.

It was reported that local authorities had been asked to set "Stretch Aims" for the Scottish Attainment Challenge for academic year 2022-23 and the Education Committee had requested that the department provide further detail around the Stretch Aims submitted as part of their SEF plan. Reference was made to specific requirements for setting local stretch aims and the national "core plus" model which had been developed. The stretch aims had been chosen to help measure the impact and outcomes locally of the activities which required to be undertaken to deliver the Scottish Attainment Challenge, and it was reported that the Education Department, in partnership with schools, had been setting local stretch and gap reducing aims for some time. National guidance on setting stretch aims indicated a need to identify equity gaps and the department's Quality Improvement Officers would provide ongoing support and challenge to ensure improved outcomes for learners.

It was further reported that progress in meeting the stretch aims would be reported on an ongoing basis through the Council's Outcome Delivery Plan, Fairer East Ren Plan and departmental Standards and Quality Report. Through the Standards and Quality Report, the Director of Education would report annually to committee and to wider stakeholders.

The Head of Education Services (Performance and Provision) was heard further regarding the report, highlighting that the stretch aims included: achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels; the proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more qualifications at SCQF level 5; the proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more qualifications at SCQF level 6; the proportion of 16-19 year olds participating in education, employment or training; and a locally identified aim of health and wellbeing.

In response to a question from Councillor O'Donnell regarding the time it may take to eliminate the poverty related attainment gap in terms of target Core A, the Director of Education advised that the information provided in the report was submitted in a format which fitted Scottish Government requirements and could appear distorted as it related to 2021 data, even though 2022 data was now available. He added that the Education Department hoped to have returned to pre-pandemic levels by the end of the current academic year.

The committee agreed to:-

- (a) approve the proposed Stretch Aims; and
- (b) ask the Director of Education to bring regular reports to committee on the progress towards these.

## **PERFORMANCE OF EAST RENFREWSHIRE SCHOOLS IN THE BROAD GENERAL EDUCATION AND SENIOR PHASE**

**237.** Councillor Anderson invited the Director of Education to give a presentation on the performance of East Renfrewshire schools in the broad general education and senior phase.

The Director indicated that the information presented would include information from primary establishments as well as senior phase data relating to SQA awards.

He reported that there had been a decrease in the proportion of children attaining expected levels of achievement in the Broad General Education standards when compared to 2018/19 (pre-Pandemic). 89% of Primary 1, 4 and 7 pupils were achieving expected levels or better for reading, 87% for writing, 93% in talking and listening, and 90% in maths. It was highlighted that while the figures had decreased slightly on those recorded in 2018-2019, they were still considerably higher than the national average in all curricular areas. It was highlighted that the largest impact had been recorded among children resident in SIMD 1 and 2 areas with an 11% decrease in reading achievement as compared to the overall figure of a 2% decrease, from 2018-19. However, SIMD 1 and 2 children achieving the expected level in numeracy had increased by 8% since 2018-19, as opposed to an overall decrease of 1%. It was reported that the literacy and numeracy levels for pupils in SIMD deciles 9 & 10 remained static, and it was hoped to bring deciles 1 & 2 back to pre-Covid attainment levels in the near future.

Further information was provided on the virtual comparator which had replaced the previous comparator schools and authorities. This would see the performance of schools and local authorities compared with the performance of a similar virtual group made up of pupils from schools in other local authorities across Scotland who had similar characteristics to our pupils. This method would support self-evaluation and improvement.

Leaver attainment across literacy and numeracy improved steadily at levels 4 and 6 with level 5 remaining steady. At level 6, East Renfrewshire pupils were more likely to attain an award and outperformed the national average by more than double. More information was given on S4 National 5 presentations and awards for all subjects, with the figures showing that presentations had increased slightly with pass rates remaining similar.

School level comparisons were provided showing 4 years' worth of data, with the authority level sitting at 77% similar to 2019 levels. All schools continued to perform well above the national average and the virtual comparator, with Eastwood High School recording its best ever results in S4. In S4, the number of pupils achieving 5 or more awards at SQA level 5 or better was 77%, down from 79% in 2021. In S5, the number of pupils achieving 5 or more awards at SQA level 6 or better was 47%, slightly down on 50% the previous year but up from 44% in 2019. In S5 strong performances were achieved by Woodfarm High School and Barrhead High School with both schools achieving their highest ever S5 results.

More information was given on the use of insight tariff points which could assist with identifying gaps between different groups of pupils e.g. by gender. Insight point information was provided by SIMD in S4 for the most deprived 30%, middle 40% and least deprived 30% of pupils, which showed that there had been an increase of 10% for the most deprived 30% since 2018 and all three categories continued to be well above the national average. In S6, insight points showed that all levels continued to perform better in all deciles when compared to the virtual comparator.

Thereafter, improvement case studies were provided for two schools. At Eastwood High School universal support was provided for all senior phase pupils and included access to study skills afternoons; supported study and Easter school; meditation and mindfulness sessions before each exam; and robust monitoring and tracking processes. Targeted support was also

provided for a number of S4 pupils focussing on literacy and numeracy; nurture/inclusion; mental health training; and additional monitoring and tracking. As a result of these approaches, SQA results for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher all improved when compared to prelim results, and in the targeted group there was a pass rate of 93% at National 5.

The second case study related to OLM Primary School where 12 pupils initially took part in a family learning and literacy programme for bilingual learners. This included attendance at a lunchtime language and culture club; and a focus on developing oral literacy; building confidence; and family inclusion. An additional 17 pupils were added to the programme and teachers reported increased pupil confidence and improved use of language in class from the pupils who took part. Families were also signposted to adult learning classes and the programme was due to continue during the current school year.

In conclusion, the Director of Education reported that, although some very strong results in both primary and secondary education had been reported and East Renfrewshire schools had performed extremely well when compared to their virtual comparators, the education service would continue to focus on excellence and equity to ensure their vision to improve outcomes for all children and young people could be delivered.

In response to a concern expressed by Councillor Devlin regarding results from schools in the Levern side of the authority which saw Barrhead High School overtake St. Luke's High School in terms of performance, the Director of Education advised that high schools in Barrhead had achieved outstanding results this year and both schools continued to work closely together to share best practice. He added that both schools continued to perform well above the national average and 99% of pupils from both schools went on to positive leaver destinations which was the highest rate across the authority.

Having heard Members request a copy of the presentation provided, the Director of Education advised that the information contained within the presentation was made available by authority and school within standards and quality reports, although in a different format, and he would attempt to provide a reduced version of the presentation. He advised that he was unable to provide the full presentation due to restrictions with the benchmarking data included.

Having heard Members commend the work of teachers and staff in producing such excellent results, the committee noted the presentation.

CHAIR