

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of virtual meeting held at 10.00am on 21 January 2021.

Present:

Councillor Paul O’Kane (Chair)	Councillor Alan Lafferty
Councillor Colm Merrick (Vice Chair)	Councillor Gordon Wallace
Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)	Dr Frank Angell
Councillor Caroline Bamforth	Ms Dorothy Graham
Councillor Danny Devlin	Ms Mary McIntyre
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	Mr Des Morris

Councillor O’Kane in the Chair

Attending:

Mark Ratter, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Fiona Morrison, Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources); Siobhan McColgan, Head Teacher, Carlibar Primary School; Graeme Hay, Education Senior Manager (Driving Business Change); Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager (Developing People); Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer; and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

Apology:

Councillor Jim McLean.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1501. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

STANDARDS AND QUALITY REPORT 2019/20

1502. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education advising of the proposed content of the Education Department’s draft 2019/20 Standards and Quality Report, a copy of which accompanied the report.

The Director of Education explained that the report was the result of the annual self-evaluation exercise carried out by the Quality Improvement Team and measured the impact and the outcomes achieved as a result of the work undertaken to implement the department’s Local Improvement Plan. The report was organised under the department’s vision of *Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving Through Excellent Experiences*. Following feedback the format of the report had been designed to provide a more concise, visual and high-level summary of the progress that had been made in implementing the 2019–2022 Local Improvement Plan.

The report included details of how East Renfrewshire schools and early-years establishments had responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted the strength of team working across the department and its ability to adapt, collaborate and support children and families, and in particular those considered to be most vulnerable.

The director concluded by explaining that the report also outlined a number of next steps that had been used to develop the Local Improvement Plan 2021–2024 which was the subject of a separate report to this meeting (Item 1503 below refers).

It was proposed to issue the report electronically to all parents with children attending East Renfrewshire schools or Early Learning and Childcare centres and it would be available to view online or download from the Council's website.

Councillor Bamforth, amongst others, commended the report, including how well the department was coping with the impact of COVID-19. She also sought clarification on the use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) in the process of recovery from learning loss and on the current number of digital devices which had been made available to pupils.

In response, the director explained that he and other members of the directorate had met with head teachers to discuss the issue of recovery from learning loss and had been informed that most schools considered that the majority of pupils were back on track although there was still some further work to be done in this regard. A further meeting had recently taken place following the implementation of the current lockdown when it had been noted that schools and pupils were taking advantage of the high quality remote learning that was currently available. The department was making excellent use of current research in this field and clear and detailed guidance had been produced. He quoted the case of 1 school where 403 out of 404 pupils had engaged with remote learning in one week and expressed the view that a considerable amount of new online learning was going on as well as live engagement and online "check-ins".

The Education Senior Manager (Driving Business Change) explained that the department had been in a strong position in respect of the availability of digital devices as a result of capital investment decisions taken over the past few years. He stated that more than 700 additional devices had recently been received including Chromebooks and digital connectivity devices. In addition, the Deputy First Minister had recently announced further funding for this purpose and the Council was awaiting confirmation of how much it would receive. The department was working closely with its suppliers to procure additional devices as soon as the funding became available.

Councillor Merrick, whilst welcoming the report, expressed the view that parents and carers remained extremely concerned about how COVID-19 would impact on their children's education, possibly for a number of years, but recognised that the department and all staff were doing their utmost to mitigate the possible long-term impact and were learning as the situation developed. He also expressed the view that the Council's past investment in early learning was reaping benefits for the future and would continue to do so.

Responding to a comment regarding attendance levels, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that the department had introduced a number of proactive measures designed to improve attendance including ensuring that school holidays, where possible, started on Friday and that the Educational Psychology team was involved in devising further measures to persuade and encourage pupils to attend school.

Councillor Wallace, whilst commending the department on a well presented report, highlighted some of the questionnaire indicators where the performance was lower. However, he noted that the department had set out actions to address this through the next steps

In response, the director undertook to seek feedback from Parent Council Chairs on the content and layout of the report, to compare the content and layout with that of other local authorities, and to continue to work closely with the Council's Communications Team in this regard.

Councillor O'Kane explained that the past year had been like no other as a result of COVID-19 and expressed his thanks to all staff, pupils and parents on how well they had adapted to remote and online learning. He also highlighted the excellent work carried on in the department's hub schools in providing emotional and pastoral support to those children and young people considered most vulnerable and commended the Facilities Management team who had provided up to 1350 school meal packs per week.

He concluded by expressing the view that there was still a considerable degree of uncertainty over when schools would restart after the current lockdown and looked forward to receiving further reports regarding future recovery plans and on the outcome of the forthcoming consultation with parents on the issue of how the current provision of free school meals could be improved.

Thereafter, the committee:-

- (a) approved the 2019/20 Standards and Quality Report; and
- (b) authorised the Director of Education to take the necessary steps to produce and issue copies of the report for stakeholders.

LOCAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2021-2024

1503. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval for the Education Department's Local Improvement Plan 2021-2024. A copy of the plan accompanied the report.

The Director of Education explained that the plan was designed to give an indication of the department's key areas for improvement over the next three years and was updated annually to take account of changing priorities. Areas of improvement were outlined and priorities would be developed through self-evaluation and information gathered through external evaluations and the implementation of the plan. The draft plan took account of the current national priority areas including the National Improvement Framework (NIF) and was informed by East Renfrewshire's Community Plan. Cognisance had been taken of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the report set out how the department would support recovery and address learning loss. In addition there would be a continued focus on addressing teacher workload with a further reduction in the number of activities planned over the three year period.

The expected, outcomes and impact were organised under the department's vision statement of *Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving through Excellent Experiences* and had been reviewed and amended to reflect national developments and the department's ongoing self-evaluation. The plan had a clear focus on improving outcomes for all learners. In line with the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 the plan also set out how the department would address the inequalities of outcomes that existed for different equity groups and how it would achieve the priorities associated with the NIF. The timescale for the implementation of the plan was over school sessions 2021-22 to 2023-24 and the department would continue to report on progress made with the plan through the annual Standards and Quality Report.

The Director concluded by explaining that the draft plan had been developed in time to allow establishments to take account of the priorities as they developed their own improvement

plans and working time agreements. It was intended to help and guide individual establishments in planning for improvement but not to prescribe what those improvements should be or how they should be taken forward. Once the plan was finalised it would be submitted to the Scottish Government in line with the requirements of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000.

Councillor Buchanan commented that this was a high-level report and, as a result, contained a considerable number of assumptions as it sought to address a number of significant unknowns. However, it addressed the issue of the Education Department's aspirations over the forthcoming 3 year period and, as a result, had to be considered as a working document. He commended all staff within the department who had worked hard to continue to deliver high quality services throughout the past year and would continue to do so over the life of the plan.

Councillor Wallace, whilst welcoming the focus on recovery actions over the life of the plan, sought clarification on the apparent dropping of the *Getting It Right For Every Child* (GIRFEC) approach and suggested that this could send a message that GIRFEC was no longer important.

In response, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that the GIRFEC approach was so firmly embedded within all educational settings across the department that it was now considered to be business as usual. She also suggested that a presentation on GIRFEC could be made to a future meeting of the committee if that was considered appropriate.

Ms Graham welcomed the report and expressed the view that GIRFEC was firmly embedded in the culture of the department. She commended the report for being all-encompassing and ambitious as well as for its flexible approach in response to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Councillor O'Kane commended the department for producing an excellent, high-level, and aspirational plan which focussed firmly on the actions required to address recovery from the learning loss resulting from the current public health situation.

Thereafter, having heard the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) reiterate that the finalised plan would be submitted to the Scottish Government in due course, the committee agreed to approve the Local Improvement Plan 2021-2024.

RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ENTITLEMENT TO 1140 HOURS OF EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE

1504. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education informing members of the results of the consultation on the implementation of 1140 hours of early learning and childcare (ELC) in East Renfrewshire and the proposals for taking this forward from August 2021 and beyond.

The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) briefly outlined the Scottish Government's transformational change agenda to provide 1140 hours of ELC for all eligible children and East Renfrewshire's response and models of delivery. In particular she referred to the committee's approval in June 2020 of the department's proposal to progress with plans to deliver 1140 hours of ELC for all eligible 2, 3, and 4 year-old children from August 2020 albeit in a more limited way given the impact of COVID-19 on plans.

She went on to explain that The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 set out a requirement for local authorities to consult on ELC every 2 years and to build, year-on-year, more flexible models of delivery through reconfiguration of services. East Renfrewshire had conducted its consultation from 26 October to 22 November 2020. Key points from the consultation included, amongst others, 80% of parents expressing a high level of overall satisfaction with their current offer of 1140 hours of ELC; the introduction of 1140 hours suited work and family life, relieving financial pressures and reducing the amount of time grandparents were being asked to provide childcare; an increase in the number of families wishing to access core hours i.e. similar to school hours; further flexibility requested in family centres; and satisfaction being highest in the Busby/Clarkston/Eaglesham community at 94% and lowest in the Giffnock/Thornliebank community at 64%.

Analysis of the responses had helped inform the models of delivery for session 2021/22 and the department would continue to operate the same models but would extend core provision to family centres. Although core provision was the least efficient model, this would increase flexibility and choice for families, give greater access to the most popular model and reduce the oversubscription of nursery classes as the exclusive providers of term-time models. As capacity within the ELC estate increased and facilities became established greater flexibility for parents would be reintroduced through the purchase of additional hours in response to demand while at the same time being mindful of the ongoing public health guidance in relation to social distancing and “bubbles” and the increase in the number of places being used as part of the least efficient model i.e. core hours.

The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) concluded by outlining the financial challenge in the expansion to 1140 hours of ELC for eligible children and reminded members of the anticipated and annual shortfall in Scottish Government funding from 2021/22. The department had used the flexibility associated with this funding to maximise the amounts carried forward each year as well as continuing to lobby the Scottish Government and CoSLA to review the distribution methodology. Whilst the outcome of the national review was still awaited the Council would continue to seek to manage the costs of expansion closely through the annual budget setting process.

Councillor Wallace commented on the amount of work that had gone into providing 1140 hours for many children and sought clarification on the reason for the low satisfaction rating in Giffnock/Thornliebank and also further information on the financial shortfall which the Council was facing in respect of the cost of proving new and enhanced ELC facilities.

In response, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that Giffnock/Thornliebank had the smallest nursery class across the Council and the lack of parental satisfaction arose because many parents were unable to secure a place in the nursery class at the school where their children were expected to attend in P1. It was anticipated that the ability to provide greater flexibility would improve when the new Glenwood Family Centre became fully operational.

The Head of Education Services (Provision and Resources) explained that, due to the delay in completing the construction of the new and extended ELC facilities as a result of the enforced shut-down of the construction sector in March 2020, there was currently a shortfall in funding. Where possible, funding had been carried forward early on in the financial year but this would still result in an overall shortfall unless additional funding was forthcoming from the Scottish Government or the Council. The Scottish Government was currently reviewing its model of funding allocation so there remained the possibility that additional funding could come to the Council once that review was concluded. The current estimated shortfall figure was in the region of £2m but she undertook to contact Councillor Wallace with a more up to date estimate.

Councillor Buchanan expressed the view that the Council had taken the correct decision when it endorsed the Education Department's proposal to proceed with provision of 1140 hours from August 2020, albeit with less flexibility due to the late delivery of the new facilities and the requirements of social distancing. This decision had put the Council in a strong position compared to some other authorities and had contributed to the high overall levels of satisfaction expressed by parents in their responses to the consultation.

Following further brief discussion, in the course of which Councillor O'Kane reiterated that CoSLA continued to lobby the Scottish Government to complete its review of the current model of funding allocation as a matter of urgency, the committee agreed to note the report and the department's proposals to further increase flexibility for parents to address parental and family needs.

EAST RENFREWSHIRE'S CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES PLAN 2020-2023

1505. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education, presenting for consideration *At Our Heart*, East Renfrewshire's Children and Young People's Services Plan for the period 2020-2023, a copy of which accompanied the report.

The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (the Act) was a key part of the Scottish Government's strategy to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. Part 3 of the Act placed new children's services planning duties on local authorities and health boards and required every local authority and its associated health board to jointly prepare a Children's Services Plan for the local authority area in respect of each 3-year period.

She went on to explain that every Children's Services Plan had to be prepared with a view to securing the achievement of 5 aims. In addition the plan was required to take account of guidance relating to a number of key messages which the plan had to include. Full details of the 5 aims and the statutory key messages were set out in detail in the draft plan.

The Children's Services Plan was also required to align with a number of other existing plans and legislative requirements including, amongst others, the Community Planning Partnership's Local Outcome Improvement Plan; the local Health Board's Strategic Plan; Early Years Strategies; and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

The draft plan provided details of the joined-up, multi-agency working across all services to focus on all of the themes and related indicators to improve the outcomes for the children and young people of East Renfrewshire. Included in the draft plan was a "plan on a page" which detailed the vision, approach, priorities, outcomes, and measures, all of which focussed on keeping children and young people safe, the mental and emotional wellbeing of children and young people, care experienced children and care leavers, families, and children with complex needs.

Councillor Wallace welcomed the focus on the health and wellbeing of children and young people and questioned the impact of the publication of the national Independent Care Review report entitled *The Promise* on services within East Renfrewshire and sought clarification on which Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were new to the plan.

In response, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that *The Promise* provided a baseline from which to start and that the draft plan had been modified to take account of its content. She also explained that the KPIs had also evolved to link in with the recommendations contained in the report.

Dr Angell referred to data within the draft plan relating to levels of dental decay in P1 pupils and expressed the view that this was closely related to the intake of sugar and asked if catering staff in schools could encourage pupils, especially younger pupils, to make healthier choices with a view to addressing this situation.

In response, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that health visitors and nursery staff encouraged young children to participate in the Daily Smile which included daily teeth brushing as a group activity, and Councillor O’Kane explained that the Council was working to improve the availability and choice of healthier options within its catering operations.

Councillor Bamforth welcomed the report and the draft plan and in particular the focus on mental health and wellbeing and the establishment of the Healthier Minds Wellbeing Team. She also commended the strong collaborative working between the Education Department and the HSCP.

Councillor Buchanan echoed the comments made by others and again commended the strong partnership working across all departments of the Council and its partners. He commended the department on a highly significant report but cautioned that, while the report highlighted that the Council was starting from a strong baseline, there was still a considerable way to go to deliver on the desired outcomes.

Following further brief discussion, in the course of which Councillor O’Kane welcomed the useful discussion that had taken place and the strong across-the-board support that had been expressed, the committee noted:-

- (a) the Children and Young People’s Services Plan 2020-2023; and
- (b) that the plan would be considered by the Integration Joint Board prior to being submitted to the Council for approval.

ARCHBISHOP PHILIP TARTAGLIA

1506. Councillor O’Kane referred to the recent death of Archbishop Philip Tartaglia of Glasgow whose funeral was due to take place later in the day.

He reminded the committee that Archbishop Tartaglia had previously been Bishop of Paisley and in that role had taken a keen interest in the work of the committee and the Education Department.

He requested that the representative of the Catholic Church, Ms Dorothy Graham, convey to the Archdiocese of Glasgow his condolences and those of the committee.

Ms Graham thanked Councillor O’Kane and the committee for their kind remarks and undertook to pass these on through Bishop Keenan of Paisley.

