

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 25 August 2016.

Present:

Councillor Elaine Green (Chair)	Councillor Gordon McCaskill
Councillor Paul O’Kane (Vice Chair)	Councillor Jim Swift
Councillor Jim Fletcher (Leader)	Councillor Vincent Waters
Councillor Tony Buchanan	Dr Frank Angell
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	Ms Dorothy Graham
Councillor Alan Lafferty	Ms Mary McIntyre
Councillor Ian McAlpine	Mr Des Morris

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); Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager; and Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer.

Also attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Gerry Mahon, Chief Officer (Legal & Procurement); Sarah Clark, Head Teacher; Ursula Scrimgeour, Depute Head Teacher; Marc Wilson, Head Boy; Stuart Cherry, Amy Clark, and Zain Ali, pupils, Isobel Mair School; and Sarah Khan and Sohaib Hussain, pupils, Woodfarm High School.

Apologies:

Councillors Danny Devlin and Mary Montague.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2148. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

2012

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

2149. Councillor Green welcomed to the meeting Ms Dorothy Graham and Mr Des Morris who were attending the committee for the first time. Ms Graham is the new representative of the Catholic Church replacing Reverend Thomas Boyle and Mr Morris the new teachers' representative replacing Alan Munro.

PRESENTATION – DREAMS COME TRUE WEEKEND 2016

2150. Councillor Green welcomed staff and pupils from Isobel Mair School and pupils from Woodfarm High School who had attended the recent Dreams Come True Weekend at Lochgoilhead Outdoor Centre.

The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that a number of young people with additional support needs from Isobel Mair School and some from mainstream secondary schools had attended the event. Each young person had been partnered with a senior pupil from S5 who had volunteered to be a “buddy” to that young person over the weekend, the group also being accompanied by members of staff giving a total of more than 90 people. The young people from Isobel Mair School and each secondary school had a number of additional support needs including mobility impairment and communication barriers and the event had been structured in such a way as to help build confidence in these young people and help build relationships with their peers and “buddies” through challenging but fun events and activities and through the provision of the opportunity to interact in a social setting. The event had been judged a great success by all who had attended.

The young people presented a number of photographs to members of the committee demonstrating the range of exciting activities in which they had taken part over the weekend and explained what they had gained from attending the event. It was also explained that a reunion was planned for September at which the pupils would celebrate their achievements at Lochgoilhead including the first Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Awards achieved by pupils from Isobel Mair School.

Councillor Green, supported by other members, commended the valuable experience gained by all of the participants. On behalf of the committee she congratulated all of the young people who had taken part in the event and also thanked those members of staff who had worked so hard and given up their weekend to ensure that the event had been such a success.

OVERVIEW OF SQA EXAMINATION RESULTS 2016

2151. Councillor Green invited the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance), Dr Mark Ratter, to give a brief overview of attainment in Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) examinations in East Renfrewshire schools in 2016.

Dr Ratter explained that the 2016 SQA results were the best ever achieved across all of the recognised key indicators. He also explained that 2015 had been the first year in which East Renfrewshire S4 pupils had been presented for the new National Qualifications with 2016 being the first year when pupils had been presented for the new Higher and Advanced Higher awards. He stressed the importance of the extensive efforts secondary school staff had made in developing the high quality courses for S5 and S6 pupils that had resulted in the first class results achieved.

Whilst explaining that a fuller and much more detailed presentation would be made to the committee in October, he highlighted a number of particular achievements including, amongst others, 77% of young people in S4 attaining 5 or more passes at Level 5, surpassing the previous best results in 2015 by 5 percentage points; Eastwood, and St Luke's High Schools recording their best ever S4 performance at Levels 4 and 5; St Ninian's and Woodfarm High Schools recording their best ever S4 performance at Level 5; and S4 pupils at Barrhead High School achieving an increase of 8 percentage points at Level 5.

He also highlighted that the results for S5 pupils in Highers had been the best ever with increases in all measures with 162 pupils achieving 5 or more Highers at grade A. At Advanced Higher in S6, pupils had also achieved their best ever results with 38% of the original S4 group achieving 1 or more Advanced Higher awards, up around 5 percentage points over the past 5 years.

Dr Ratter concluded by saying that the improvements at S4, S5 and S6 in the 2016 SQA results provided clear evidence that the department had raised the bar for all pupils and was delivering on its vision of *Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving through Excellent Experiences*.

Councillor Fletcher congratulated the Director and her team on another set of impressive results whilst cautioning that it was becoming more difficult to continue to perform at such a high level. He also reported that he had written to the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills inviting him to visit East Renfrewshire to see for himself the excellent work being done with a view to adopting some of the examples of best practice and rolling them out nationally.

Councillor O'Kane added his congratulations on an excellent set of results and highlighted the evidence that efforts to close the attainment gap were obviously beginning to achieve the desired result. He concluded by expressing the view that East Renfrewshire was clearly producing well rounded young people and preparing them well for life beyond school.

Having heard members congratulate the Education Service, and all those involved in the education system in East Renfrewshire on the excellent results achieved, and having heard that a full presentation, including an examination of the improvement made by pupils in the most disadvantaged groups, would be made to the next meeting of the committee on 6 October, Councillor Green thanked the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) for his informative overview of the results.

HEALTH, SAFETY AND SECURITY – REVIEW OF 2015/16 AND PRIORITIES FOR 2016/17

2152. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 27 August 2015 (Page 1583, Item 1690 refers), when it had been agreed that a further report would be provided at the end of session 2015/16, the committee considered a report by the Director of Education reviewing progress in achieving the key objectives in health, safety and security in 2015/16. The report also looked forward to the forthcoming year noting that the department remained committed to health, safety and security issues and setting further goals for 2016/17. A copy of the Education Department Annual Health, Safety and Security Report accompanied the report.

The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) reported that the Education Department remained committed to maintaining and improving its standards in health, safety and security and this was evidenced by work undertaken in 2015/16 and planned activity for 2016/17 contained within the departmental Annual Health, Safety and Security Report 2016.

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She highlighted the significant progress that the department had made in meeting its objectives linked to fire safety with a 100% completion for all objectives. She also highlighted the high numbers of staff attending health and safety training and expressed the view that this demonstrated the department's commitment to updating staff and keeping health and safety high on the agenda. Fire risk assessments and health and safety audits had been carried out on a sample of schools and most of the actions identified had been addressed through robust management of health and safety procedures and the commitment of head teachers and other school staff. Those which had not been fully addressed had been in the main related to building fabric issues which had complied with legislation at the time of building but which now required further investment to bring them up to current standard.

Accident and incident figures showed an increase in instances of violence towards staff compared to 2014/15 but it was explained that, as in previous years, the majority of such instances had been attributed to a small number of pupils with significant additional support needs. It was also explained that the department continued to work with schools to respond to this type of behaviour.

Mr Morris welcomed the progress which had been made with particular reference to the provision of additional training for staff. With reference to the rise in incidents of violence towards staff he expressed the view that any increase was to be regretted but noted that the trades unions now met formally with senior management twice each year in an effort to address this matter.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) note the progress made in 2015/16 in achieving the Education Department's agreed health, safety and security objectives;
- (b) approve the health, safety and security objectives recommended for 2016/17; and
- (c) instruct the Director of Education to provide a further report at the end of session 2016/17.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT YEAR END REPORT 2015/16

2153. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education informing members of the year end performance of the Education Department based on performance indicators in the Outcome Delivery Plan (ODP) 2014 -17. A copy of the Education Department Year End Report 2015/16 accompanied the report.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) reported that progress against the performance indicators and activities in the ODP was reviewed on a six-monthly basis and the report set out a high level summary of the performance of the Education Department throughout 2015/16 under the headings of; Outcomes, Customers, Efficiency and People. A number of key highlights under each heading were included along with areas where further improvement was necessary. He went on to explain that the information presented in the report represented a very positive picture overall

Having heard Councillor Lafferty commend the report and express the view that much of the success had been the result of close partnership working between the Education Department and a number of other key stakeholders, the committee approved the report as a summary of the Education Department's year end performance for 2015/16.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR ADMISSIONS AND THE TRANSFER OF PUPILS FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY OF ALL EAST RENFREWSHIRE ROMAN CATHOLIC AND NON-DENOMINATIONAL PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS EFFECTIVE FROM JANUARY 2017

2154. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of the committee of 9 June 2016 (Page 1949, Item 2073 refers) when the pressure on denominational (Roman Catholic) places in the east of the Council area had been noted and also that the Director of Education would bring a further report to the committee in August considering options for the management of denominational places, including, where necessary, the need to carry out a formal education consultation, the committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval to carry out a statutory education consultation on a proposal to change the arrangements for admissions and the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary which would put in place a single and consistent set of criteria for all East Renfrewshire denominational and non-denominational primary and secondary schools to take effect from January 2017. A copy of the proposed consultation document accompanied the report.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that the Council was required to consult formally on any proposal to change the arrangements for admissions and the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary schools. The way in which such a consultation was carried out and who must be consulted was clearly set out in the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended. He went on to explain that a number of East Renfrewshire schools had very high occupancy levels as a result of demand from within their catchment areas and through places being allocated as a result of placing requests. Virtually all of the Council's schools had been expanded and new schools provided to meet demand and, in an effort to address continued increasing demand for places, the Council had recently taken the decision to expand primary provision in the east of the authority area. As a result, the new St Clare's Primary School would begin accepting pupils in August 2017 with a new non-denominational primary school following in August 2019.

He went on to outline the rationale behind the various options set out in the proposed consultation document including detailed data analysis to support each option. Included in the analysis were projected pupil population figures across all sectors along with figures showing current and future school capacity. He also outlined the proposed order of priorities for granting placing requests to all denominational and non-denominational primary and secondary schools which, if approved, would be effective from January 2017. He concluded by explaining the educational benefits of the proposed new arrangements and the implications, both financial and non-financial, of the proposals.

Councillor Fletcher welcomed the proposed consultation and expressed his disappointment that Councillor Swift had chosen to speak to the press before the matter had been discussed at committee. He explained that the Council had always taken a practical approach to school capacity and had continually increased and updated its school estate in response to growing demand. He went on to express the view that doing nothing was not a viable option and that building a new denominational secondary school would not be the best use of scarce financial resources as sufficient capacity already existed and much of the additional capacity created by building a new school would merely generate even more placing requests from parents in neighbouring authorities.

Councillor Swift expressed the view that he was broadly supportive of the proposed consultation but suggested that some of the data used was out of date and would not stand up to closer scrutiny. In response the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) undertook to provide the base data used throughout the proposal document.

2016

Councillor McCaskill sought clarification on why, of all the neighbouring local authorities from which placing requests could conceivably come, only Glasgow City Council (GCC) had been included in the list of individuals and bodies with which the Council would consult on the proposal. In reply, the Director of Education explained that some pupils of St Angela's and St Vincent's primary schools, which were in Glasgow, currently had priority admission through placing requests to St Ninian's High School and as a result GCC had to be regarded as a statutory consultee. Notwithstanding this, responses from any other local authority would be welcomed.

A number of other members added their support for the consultation and expressed the view that the timing of the proposed changes was right given the need to take appropriate action in a measured fashion to avoid giving the impression of the changes being a knee-jerk reaction. The view was also expressed that it was important to ensure maximum transparency on all aspects of the proposals in order that there could be no suggestion of information being withheld and to ensure that Catholic parents were able to have their children educated in a Catholic setting if they so wished. In response, the Director of Education reported that no East Renfrewshire Catholic child had been refused a place at a Catholic school.

Ms Graham explained that the Catholic Church fully supported the proposed consultation and urged the Council to listen to the views of parents and to make an appropriate response following the conclusion of the consultation.

Councillor O'Kane reiterated that the timing of the proposed consultation was right and welcomed the robust discussion which had taken place. He also urged Elected Members to encourage as many individuals and groups as possible in their wards to participate in the consultation in order that the widest possible range of views could be considered by the Education Department. He concluded by reporting that a concerted communication strategy including press releases, bag drops, public meetings and postings on the Council website and social media platforms had been devised to encourage responses.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) approve that the Director of Education proceeds with a consultation on a proposal to change the arrangements for admissions and the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary in respect of all non-denominational and denominational (Roman Catholic) schools from January 2017; and,
- (b) instruct the Director to report on the results of the consultation to Education Committee in December 2016.

PROPOSED ADDITIONAL MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

2155. The committee considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive seeking approval of a proposal to hold an additional meeting of the committee on Tuesday 20 December 2016.

The report explained that under the Council's Standing Orders it was necessary for the committee to approve a proposal to hold any additional meetings following approval of the annual calendar of meetings by the Council. Under reference to Item 2154 above, the Director of Education had undertaken to report the results of the consultation on proposed changes

2017

to admissions arrangements to an additional meeting of the committee in December 2016. Following consultation with the Convener and Vice Convener for Education and Equalities it had been proposed that this additional meeting would take place on Tuesday 20 December at 10.00am.

The committee approved the proposal to hold an additional meeting of the committee on Tuesday 20 December 2016.

CHAIR

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