

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of virtual meeting held at 10.00am on 10 June 2021.

Present:

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

Councillor O’Kane in the Chair

Attending:

Mark Ratter, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement); Fiona Morrison, Head of Education Services (Performance and Provision); Siobhan McColgan, Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Tracy Morton, Education Senior Manager (Developing People); Graeme Hay, Education Senior Manager (Leading Business Change); Joe McCaig, Quality Improvement Officer; John Burke, Committee Services Officer; and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1669. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE ANNUAL REPORT

1670. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education advising on the approaches taken to develop Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) services. The report outlined the steps taken to improve the quality, flexibility, accessibility and affordability of provision and experiences for young people.

By way of background, the report explained that the Scottish Government had set a transformational agenda for ELC, published in March 2017, including the expansion of entitlement to free ELC provision from 600 to 1140 hours. In September 2017, the Education Committee had approved the Council’s expansion plan to achieve the targets set.

In March 2020, the Scottish Government announced that they would remove the statutory duty on education authorities to make 1140 hours of ELC available to each child from August 2020. However, in June 2020, following consultation with officers, the Education Committee approved the department’s proposal to continue 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 limited fashion, and this had allowed the provision to be delivered ahead of the official timetable.

Details on the quality ratings provided to ELC establishments by the Care Inspectorate were provided in the report. It was noted that the quality of ELC in East Renfrewshire exceeded the national standard with most settings achieving grades of very good or better in every measure. Information was also provided on private and voluntary ELC providers, where all met and, in some cases, exceeded the national standard.

Data was provided on children achieving key developmental milestones in each of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) areas and it was shown that there had been a reversal in the previous reduction in the gap between the results of those areas from the most affluent. Children being unable to attend nursery during lockdown and nursery closures were cited as potential reasons for this reduction. Additional resources had been targeted in primary schools to support all children and young people who had suffered as a result of learning loss over the lockdown.

A similar increase in the poverty measured attainment gap, using SIMD as a characteristic, had been identified in numeracy, with the gap increasing from 9 points in 2019/20 to 13 points in 2020/21. However, there had been a slight decrease in the gap in literacy from 16 points in 2019/20 to 15 points in 2020/21.

Details were also provided on the quality of the early years workforce. Particular mention was made of the "Grow Your Own" pathway which had allowed Council staff to retrain and gain qualifications in the early years field. The diversity of the workforce had also increased as a result with 13 male employees and 21 black and minority ethnic employees now working in the sector.

Councillor Bamforth sought clarification of whether further ELC places would be required in East Renfrewshire to meet demand as a result of the proposed changes to deferral arrangements and whether new establishments would be needed. The Head of Education (Quality Improvement) responded that new nurseries would be required to offer the additional places referred to and this situation was being kept under review.

In response to a question from Councillor Lafferty regarding the difficulty in recruiting staff, the Head of Education (Quality Improvement) once again highlighted the "Grow Your Own" pathway and highlighted the great success in recruiting staff into the sector by investing in training the current workforce to meet the needs of the community.

Councillor Wallace expressed concerns around the attainment gap and asked how it compared with other authorities in response to which the Head of Education (Quality Improvement) indicated that as not all local authorities recorded their data in the same way, like for like comparison was not always possible. Information from the West Partnership, however anecdotal, indicated that the issue was similar across all areas. The Director of Education noted that a clearer picture would emerge when national Curriculum for Excellence data was gathered in the summer.

Councillor Merrick indicated thanks to the department and highlighted the many successes and achievements of officers in this area, particularly in delivering 1140 hours ahead of schedule.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to note the report.

DEVELOPING THE YOUNG WORKFORCE

1671. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education advising of progress made with Developing the Young Workforce in East Renfrewshire.

Having outlined the background to the production of the local Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Implementation Plan approved by the Education Committee in August 2015, the report explained that the summary that accompanied the report set out the improvements that had been made within East Renfrewshire across schools, colleges and employers to prepare young people for their working lives with evidence of progress, key achievements and next steps being set out under 4 key themes; schools; colleges; apprenticeships; and employers.

The report also drew attention to a number of the key highlights from the progress report including that participation in the national data hub by East Renfrewshire Council had been recognised as excellent practice by Education Scotland. In addition, the ERC participation rate in 2020 was 96.7% against the national average of 92.1% and 96.2% of East Renfrewshire school leavers in 2019-20 were in a positive destination.

Finally the report explained that to reflect the work that had taken place and areas for further improvement the DYW Implementation Plan had been reviewed and updated. The update reflected the current context and covered a 1 year period. A copy of the updated plan accompanied the report as Appendix 2.

In response to a question from Councillor Wallace about foundation apprenticeships and the dropout rates of young people from those, the Head of Education (Quality Improvement) noted that the East Renfrewshire position had been very positive, with the takeup and retention of students very high, which had resulted in an extension in the offer of foundation apprenticeships. Efforts were made annually to adjust the offer to ensure that sufficient capacity was available in the most popular courses and provide potential new courses to reflect the sorts of skills young people were looking for in the current employment market.

Councillor Bamforth reflected on the excellent figures around positive destinations for school leavers in East Renfrewshire and asked further about the increase in the foundation apprenticeship offer. The Head of Education (Quality Improvement) indicated that the number of courses had increased from 12 to 15 for the next session, over a number of levels to allow a wider range of students to gain access.

Councillor Merrick thanked officers for another detailed and evidence based report and pointed out the recognition by Education Scotland of the Council's use of the national data hub as excellent practice. Further, he welcomed that the draft implementation plan had a strong emphasis on equality.

Thereafter, the committee:

- (a) noted the Developing the Young Workforce in East Renfrewshire progress report; and
- (b) approved the updated draft implementation plan for 2021-2022.

IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

1672. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education advising of the assessment against recommendations made in the *Improving Outcomes for Young People through School* report prepared by Audit Scotland, a copy of which accompanied the report.

The Audit Scotland report had been published in March 2021, following the Accounts Commission's audit on how effectively the Scottish Government, councils and their partners were improving outcomes for young people through school education.

It was noted that there was strong evidence in East Renfrewshire of the Education Department's relentless focus to deliver excellence and equity for all its learners. This was clearly represented by the department's vision of *Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving through Excellent Experiences*.

The key messages within the Audit Scotland report were detailed. However, it was noted that the report focused on attainment before the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In arriving at their conclusions of performance, Audit Scotland had made a number of recommendations for the Scottish Government, councils and Education Scotland to work together to take forward. There were also some specific recommendations for partners. All were included in the Audit Scotland report. The key messages and recommendations in the report were considered to present no difficulty for the Education Department or the Council. The department's assessment of its current position in relation to the recommendations for it to take forward was attached as appendix 2 to the report.

Councillor Wallace expressed some concern around the number of school leavers achieving literacy and numeracy at level 4, indicating that 4.2% were not achieving that level. In reply, the Quality Improvement Officer indicated that pupils who had not met that measure would be specifically targeted by resources to assist them. Furthermore, an approach to introduce "Application of Mathematics" courses, which provided numeracy and mathematics in a different context, was being implemented. An improvement was expected as a result of that approach.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to note the report.

IMPLEMENTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN EAST RENFREWSHIRE – PROGRESS

1673. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education advising of how children's rights were currently respected and ensured within East Renfrewshire, as well as highlighting key actions being taken to further embed children's rights across the Council.

In particular, the report focussed on the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 placed a duty on local authorities to report on the steps they had taken to secure better or further the effect of UNCRC requirements. This had also been incorporated into the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation)(Scotland) Bill.

The East Renfrewshire Children's Rights Report, a copy of which accompanied the report as appendix 1, outlined the steps that had been taken in East Renfrewshire to promote, support and uphold children's rights. The report detailed how each individual article of the UNCRC was addressed within East Renfrewshire, and a child-friendly version of the document was available to all families.

It was noted that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation)(Scotland) Bill had been passed by the Scottish Parliament on 16 March 2021. However, the UK Government had referred the Bill to the Supreme Court. An implementation group had been set up to work with partners to assess, review and develop the Council's readiness for the implementation of the Bill should it pass the Supreme Court challenge. The group would produce an action plan, which would be the subject of a future report to the Education Committee and the Cabinet.

Responding to a question from Councillor Merrick on timescales for when the implementation group's action plan would be produced, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) indicated that work was underway with national guidance expected in the summer. The expected timeframe was October/November 2021.

All members agreed that regardless of the legal situation, an approach focusing on the needs of the child or young person was essential and welcome.

Thereafter, the committee:-

- (a) noted current practice within East Renfrewshire underpinning and ensuring children's rights;
- (b) noted the East Renfrewshire Children's Rights Report;
- (c) noted the authority's key actions going forward to respect and ensure children's rights; and
- (d) requested that the Director of Education bring forward a report to the Education Committee setting out the potential implications and actions for the Council in the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law.

VALEDICTORY – FIONA MORRISON, HEAD OF EDUCATION SERVICES (PERFORMANCE AND PROVISION)

1674. Councillor O'Kane advised the committee that this would be the last meeting attended by Fiona Morrison, Head of Education (Performance and Provision), who was retiring from the Council.

He briefly outlined her contribution to education within East Renfrewshire, particularly since becoming Head of Service in 2002, and expressed his personal thanks to her for the help and support she had always given him in his role as Vice-Convener and, latterly, as Convener for Education. Particular reference was made to her work in relation to developing the school estate which she had worked to improve.

Ms Morrison responded in appropriate terms, in the course of which she expressed the view that her employment in East Renfrewshire had been extremely rewarding and fulfilling. She commended the senior management team that had supported her, highlighted the strong partnership working which existed across the entire Council, and praised Elected Members for their continued prioritisation of education.

She concluded by commending her successor, Joe McCaig, to the committee.

POSITION OF CHAIR – COUNCILLOR O’KANE

1675. Councillor O’Kane advised the Committee that, due to his election as a Member of the Scottish Parliament, this would be the last meeting where he would act as Chair as he was stepping down from the position. A new Chair would be appointed at the next meeting of the full Council on 30 June 2021.

Councillor O’Kane thanked all of the officers and elected members, including those not present at the meeting or who had worked with the committee in the past, for their assistance over his time as Chair. He commended the work of the Education Department and celebrated the many successes that had been achieved over his time as Chair.

Members of the committee from all political parties expressed their thanks to Councillor O’Kane for his work as Chair and intimated their congratulations on his election as a Member of the Scottish Parliament.

CHAIR