

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 2 April 2015.

Present:

Councillor Elaine Green (Chair)	Councillor Ian McAlpine
Councillor Danny Devlin	Councillor Mary Montague
Councillor Jim Fletcher (Leader)	Dr Frank Angell
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	Ms Mary McIntyre
Councillor Alan Lafferty	Mr Alan Munro

Councillor Green in the Chair

Attending:

Mhairi Shaw, Director of Education; John Fitzpatrick, Head of Education Services (Inclusion, Schools and Staff); Marie Kelly, Education Senior Manager (Quality Improvement); Mark Ratter, Education Senior Manager (Planning and Reporting); Clare Creighton, Quality Improvement Officer (Item 1495 only) and Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies:

Councillors Paul O’Kane (Vice Chair), Tony Buchanan, Jim Swift and Vincent Waters.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1494. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

PRE-5 EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE ANNUAL REPORT

1495. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education providing an update on the approaches taken to develop pre-5 education and childcare services and outlining the next steps to further improve the quality of provision and experiences of young children.

The report explained that The Scottish Government’s aspiration through the Early Years Collaborative had set out clear intentions to improve the outcomes for all of Scotland’s children and that the Council’s focus in this regard would remain on the earliest years.

The report went on to outline a number of key issues including the significant progress which had been made in a number of areas by the Education Department including implementation of the requirement under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 to provide 600

hours of early learning and childcare to all 3 and 4 year olds and certain 2 year olds; the introduction of a new model for allocating additional educational resource for children aged 0 – 5 years; and the provision of additional capacity to meet the demand for nursery places in both local authority and partnership establishments, particularly in the Eastwood side of the authority. The proposed next steps for these areas were also outlined.

Responding to a concern expressed by Councillor Fletcher regarding a private nursery which had been unsuccessful in gaining partnership status for 2015/16, the Director of Education explained that the decision on whether or not to award partnership status was based on a number of criteria including evaluations of the work of the establishment by the department and external inspectors. In this particular case the decision not to award the establishment partnership status had been taken as a result of this process prior to recently reported events coming to light.

Having heard the Director of Education confirm that it was anticipated that the new-build Busby Family Centre would be completed early in 2016 but that temporary accommodation would be made available for the start of school session 2015/16, the committee agreed to note the contents of the Pre-5 Education and Childcare Annual Report and approve the next steps as outlined.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN EAST RENFREWSHIRE SCHOOLS

1496. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval of the content of a report on Vocational Education in East Renfrewshire Schools.

The report explained that a vocational programme had been introduced in East Renfrewshire in 2004 with the principal aim of developing skills for learning, life and work by broadening the range of educational experiences, including work-related and college-based learning, for pupils in the senior phase. With the publication in December 2014 of The Scottish Government's response to the recommendations of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (the Wood Commission), a review of vocational education provided a timely opportunity to assess the readiness of schools to implement The Scottish Government's 7-year implementation plan entitled Developing the Young Workforce – Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy. The review had been carried out in October and November 2014 and the review team had analysed data and engaged with pupils, parents, staff and other stakeholders. It also noted the recommendations of the final report of the Wood Commission and The Scottish Government's response to that report.

The Head of Education Services (Inclusion, Schools and Staff) explained that the report of the review provided a comprehensive overview of the vocational programme in East Renfrewshire over the 10-year period from 2004 to 2014 highlighting a number of key strengths as well as a number of areas for improvement. Taken together with the main recommendations contained in Developing the Young Workforce – Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy, the 19 recommendations contained in the report provided a secure foundation for a future implementation plan to be led by the Education Department which would meet the needs of the young workforce in East Renfrewshire. The Department would work with the Environment Department, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), WorkER, the college sector and other partners to address the main recommendations of Developing the Young Workforce – Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy and to devise an implementation plan which would meet the needs of the young workforce locally.

In response to comments from Members, the Head of Education Services (Inclusion, Schools and Staff) clarified that a primary function of the proposed new post outlined in the report would be to co-ordinate a wide range of activities across all departments of the

Council and other partners in an effort to achieve the recommendations in the report and that the post holder would be expected to have the knowledge, skills and attributes required to drive forward the challenging agenda set out in The Scottish Government's 7-year implementation plan. He went on to explain the importance of gaining the buy-in of local employers; the difficulty that this presented as a result of East Renfrewshire not being a typical local authority area by virtue of its predominately residential makeup; the aim of every school having an employment partner; and the encouraging early signs in this regard.

Responding to comments from Mr Munro regarding the availability of capacity within schools to achieve the aims of the strategy and how the quoted 80% retention rate compared to other local authorities, the Head of Education Services (Inclusion, Schools and Staff), supported by the Director of Education, explained that the strategy involved a 7-year plan the foundations of which had been laid in East Renfrewshire in 2004. He also explained that with more than 400 pupils currently involved in the vocational programme which required them to attend local further education colleges for part of the week, some staff time had been freed up in schools to be redirected as appropriate. Funding for the programme had been committed for the coming year and the Council was working with COSLA with a view to negotiating additional funding in future years. The retention rate had increased from 60% to 80% over the 10 years since the introduction of the vocational programme locally in 2004 and this was in part due to the fact that the programme now better met the needs of local employers. The retention rate was expected to increase further as the programme was fine-tuned in line with the requirements of employers and local labour market information. Future inspections conducted by Education Scotland were expected to focus more closely on the performance of schools in relation to the vocational programme. It was also explained that work was underway to highlight to parents the value of vocational education as a viable alternative for those pupils who did not view higher education as meeting their aspirations. In this regard a Modern Apprenticeship Week was planned for May 2015 with a view to informing pupils and parents of the merits of the vocational programme and employment opportunities available through the modern apprenticeship route.

The Quality Improvement Officer, responding to a comment from Councillor Lafferty welcoming the support offered to looked-after children and those with additional support needs, explained that the department worked closely with partners to ensure that these two groups had access to bespoke programmes tailored specifically to their needs and to continually refresh the programme. It also worked with schools to continually review future cohorts of young people within these groups to ensure that suitable arrangements were in place to accommodate them.

Having heard a number of other Members welcome the report, the committee:-

- (a) noted the progress that had been made in the development of vocational education as part of the senior phase in East Renfrewshire secondary schools;
- (b) approved the recommendations of the report to ensure further improvement in the vocational programme; and
- (c) noted that, in response to Developing the Young Workforce – Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy, the Education Department would work with partners to devise an implementation plan which would meet the needs of the young workforce in East Renfrewshire.

STANDARDS AND QUALITY REPORT 2013 – 2014

1497. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education advising of the proposed content of the Education Department's 2013/14 Standards and Quality Report, a copy of which accompanied the report.

Having set out the legislative obligations on local authorities to produce and publish annually a local improvement plan which detailed how schools and services would continuously improve, and based on this plan a Standards and Quality report detailing how improvements in provision had been sought and achieved, the report outlined the progress made by the Education Department and its schools and services in taking forward the improvement agenda set out in the local improvement plan.

The report explained that the department had undertaken a self-evaluation exercise which had informed the draft report and helped outline the steps to be included in the next local improvement plan which would be the subject of a future report to the committee. The draft Standards and Quality report highlighted the very good and excellent standards achieved by the department, its schools and services, including details of some of the activities which had been undertaken during the 2013/14 school session and their impact on stakeholders.

It was proposed to issue a summary report to all parents with children attending East Renfrewshire schools with copies going to parents of all pre-school children and copies of the full report being available in all libraries, education, sports and cultural centres and on the Council's website.

Responding to comments from Members regarding the possible exploitation of children for personal publicity highlighted by a recent case in another local authority area, the Director of Education explained that East Renfrewshire operated a strong code of conduct in this regard and cited the robust approach which had been taken during the run-up to the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014. She also explained that all school staff were regularly reminded of the Council's code of conduct and agreed that a further reminder at this time would be appropriate.

Having heard a number of Members commend the Education Department on an excellent report, the committee:-

- (a) approved the 2013/14 Standards and Quality Report; and
- (b) authorised the Director of Education to take the necessary steps to produce and issue copies of the full report and a summary leaflet for parents as outlined.

CHAIR