

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 10.00am in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Giffnock on 27 August 2015.

Present:

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

Councillor Green in the Chair

Attending:

Mhairi Shaw, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Acting Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity); Mark Ratter, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance); and Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer.

Also Attending:

Sophie Brough; Jamie Brownlie; William Campbell; and Sara Clegg; pupils, Isobel Mair School; Ronan Docherty; and Rachael McGuire, pupils, St Ninian’s High School; Sarah Clark; Head Teacher; Lynn O’Brien; and Ursula Scimgeour; staff, Isobel Mair School.

Apologies:

Councillor Tony Buchanan; and Reverend Thomas Boyle.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1685. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

PRESENTATION – DREAMS COME TRUE WEEKEND 2015

1686. Councillor Green welcomed staff and pupils from Isobel Mair School and pupils from St Ninian’s High School who had attended the recent Dreams Come True Weekend at Lochgoilhead Outdoor Centre over the weekend of 12 – 14 June.

It was explained that a number of young people with additional support needs from Isobel Mair School had attended the event. Each young person had been partnered with a senior pupil (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 approximately 100 people who had attended the event. The young people from Isobel Mair 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 an opportunity to interact in a social setting. The event had been judged a great success by all who had attended.

The committee was then shown a short DVD of the highlights of the weekend.

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

OVERVIEW OF SQA EXAMINATION RESULTS 2015

1687. Councillor Green invited the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) to give a brief overview of attainment in Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) examinations in East Renfrewshire schools in 2015.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that 2015 was the first year that East Renfrewshire S4 pupils had been presented for the new National Qualifications and highlighted the importance of the efforts that secondary school staff had made in developing high quality courses that had resulted in the first class results achieved by S4 pupils. He went on to refer to some of the year’s key highlights including 72% of young people in S4 achieving 5 or more qualifications at Level 5, up 11 points since 2011; Eastwood, St Luke’s and Williamwood High Schools achieving their best ever S4 performance at Level 5 with Eastwood High increasing by 13 points from the previous year; 94% of S4 pupils achieving 5 or more awards at Level 4, the highest ever result and up from 91% in 2014 with Barrhead and Woodfarm High Schools having their best ever S4 performance at Level 4; and across the authority, 244 pupils (18% of the year group) achieving 8 or more Grade A passes at Level 5.

Higher results for S5 pupils were also the best ever with significant increases in all measures. 42% of the original S4 roll achieved 5 or more Highers compared to 39% the previous year; 64% achieved 3 or more Highers, an increase of more than 10 points over the previous 5 years; 170 pupils achieved 5 or more Highers at Grade A, the highest ever proportion; Mearns Castle and St Ninian’s High Schools had their best ever S5 results with 50% or more of S5 pupils achieving 5 or more Highers.

At Advanced Higher in S6, the authority also achieved its best ever performance with 37% of the original S4 group achieving 1 or more Advanced Highers, up from 35% in 2013; Eastwood and Mearns Castle High Schools both saw significant increases of 5% or more and their best ever results in the proportion of S6 pupils achieving 1 or more Advanced Highers.

Responding to comments from members regarding the recent publicity surrounding the degree of difficulty of this year's mathematics Higher examination, the Director of Education, supported by the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance), explained that pupils in East Renfrewshire had completed the "old" examination due to the decision taken previously by the committee to allow the department an additional year to prepare for the introduction of the new National Qualifications and as a result no local pupils had been affected. In general however, she explained that the "new" mathematics Higher examination had been too difficult but that the SQA had quickly recognised this and had put in place appropriate adjustments to the marking of the paper in order to ensure that no candidate was disadvantaged as a result. She further explained that in her opinion, this would level out over time and that the SQA would have reflected on this year's examination and will amend as appropriate for future years.

Having heard members congratulate the Education Service, and all those involved in the education system in East Renfrewshire, including pupils, parents and particularly teachers who had seen their workload increase significantly in an effort to prepare for the changes, 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 in October, Councillor Green thanked the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) for his informative overview of the results.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT YEAR END REPORT 2014/15

1688. 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 -2017.

It was 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 in 2014/15 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 considered necessary.

Responding to comments from Councillor McCaskill with regard to the level of exclusions within East Renfrewshire schools and the level of expenditure per pupil in both the primary and secondary phases, the Director of Education explained that the low level of exclusions allowed those pupils who displayed challenging behaviour to remain within the safe environment of school and to benefit from appropriate support measures designed to address their individual needs. She also explained that the level of educational expenditure clearly demonstrated that the department managed its resources efficiently whilst providing a high quality service to residents. Responding to Councillor Swift regarding what action was being taken to improve the level of sickness absence amongst staff she explained that this was a matter of some disappointment to her and the management team but that considerable effort was being made in consultation with a number of partners to try to reduce the level of absence. She also explained that analysis of the figures had highlighted an increase in cancer related absences and that this could, in part, be directly related to the increasing age profile of teaching staff.

Mr Munro expressed the view that the constant pressure on budgets with associated reductions in staff levels would place additional stress on staff and could lead to a further increase in absence rates.

Councillor Fletcher, supported by other members, expressed the view that continuing financial pressures on the Council would inevitably lead to increased pressure on all staff and that given this, combined with the effects of an aging workforce, it would not be surprising to see increases in absence rates in future years. In response, the Director of Education explained that the Education Psychological Service was available to support the needs of staff as well as pupils and that efforts were underway to increase physical activity amongst school staff through programmes developed in consultation with the Active Schools Co-ordinators.

Following further brief discussion, in the course of which the Director of Education confirmed that the faith schools' joint campus at Newton Mearns was being funded through the Council's normal capital planning process with only a very small contribution from Scottish Futures Trust (SFT), the committee approved the report as a summary of the Education Department's year end performance for 2014/15.

LANGUAGE LEARNING IN EAST RENFREWSHIRE SCHOOLS

1689. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 28 August 2014 (Page 861, Item 905 refers), when the draft policy on Language Learning in East Renfrewshire had been approved, the committee considered a report by the Director of Education providing an update and seeking continued approval for the policy based on a 1+2 Approach. This was a government policy aimed at ensuring that every child had an opportunity to learn a modern language from P1 onwards with every child having the right to learn a second modern language from P5 onwards.

The report explained that during school session 2014/15 the policy had been implemented across all East Renfrewshire schools. Implementation had included the appointment of a seconded Modern Languages Development Officer, a full-time teacher of Mandarin, preparation of resources, staff training, and the deployment of Foreign Language Assistants and seconded Chinese teachers. A full evaluation of year 1 of the policy had been carried out in June 2015 and had shown that the policy had progressed well with all planned targets having been exceeded. Children had been enthusiastic about the opportunities to learn new languages and skills with boys in particular having enjoyed learning Mandarin, and staff confidence had increased in delivering new aspects of the curriculum. The department and schools had continued to be ambitious in the implementation of the policy and had explored opportunities to further develop the plan which had been approved by the committee in January 2014. As a result the range of languages on offer in the Mearns Castle, Williamwood and St Ninian's clusters was being expanded. The report concluded by explaining that the Scottish Government was committed to providing annual funding to support the implementation of 1+2 Language Learning with East Renfrewshire's share rising from £115,000 in 2014/15 to £167,000 in 2015/16. This funding would be used to fund the seconded post, the provision of modern languages teaching staff and foreign language assistants.

In response to comments from members, the Director of Education explained that the delivery of language learning had been driven in part by the wider employability agenda and that Spanish had become particularly popular as a result of it being the most prevalent alternative language in America after English. The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance), responding to an enquiry from Dr Angell, explained that Hebrew could be considered to be the "mother tongue" in Calderwood Lodge Primary School and as a result that school effectively adopted a 1+3 Approach to language learning.

Councillor Fletcher questioned the possible inclusion of Urdu as an alternative language given the size of the local minority ethnic community. In response, the Director of Education explained that Urdu had previously been considered as the second language for Eastwood High School cluster and undertook to keep the matter of future availability under review, depending on the availability of suitably qualified teaching staff. She also explained, in response to a comment from Mr Munro, that larger schools allowed more flexibility than smaller schools but that Mandarin had proven to be very popular within Barrhead High School cluster.

Following further brief discussion the committee agreed:-

- (a) to approve the continued implementation of the policy on Language Learning in East Renfrewshire based on a 1+2 Approach; and
- (b) that the Director of Education continue to progress the policy.

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Councillor McAlpine left the meeting at this point.

HEALTH, SAFETY AND SECURITY – REVIEW OF 2014/15 AND PRIORITIES FOR 2015/16

1690. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 28 August 2014 (Page 1131, Item 1180 refers), when it had been agreed that a further report would be provided at the end of session 2014/15, the committee considered a report by the Director of Education reviewing progress in achieving the key objectives in health, safety and security in 2014/15. 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 2015/16. A copy of the Education Department Annual Health, Safety and Security Report accompanied the report.

It was 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 2014/15 and planned activity for 2015/16 contained within the departmental Annual Health, Safety and Security Report 2015.

The report set out progress in 2014/15 highlighting the activity undertaken in risk assessment; audit and inspection; training; responding to new requirements and situations; significant progress in carrying out fire risk assessments; and reviewing evacuation procedures. It highlighted the return to earlier higher levels of incidents, particularly those involving physical violence, following the marked reduction recorded in 2013/14. As in previous years, it was noted that the majority of such incidents were attributable to a small number of pupils and were in the main associated with pupils with additional support needs. However, it was explained that in these instances strategies and support arrangements were in place to respond to challenging behaviour.

Priority areas for 2015/16 were categorised under three main headings of fire, training and risk assessment with some of the priority areas being listed. The report concluded by explaining that with the transfer of services to East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Ltd (ERCL), from July 2015 culture and leisure services would no longer come within the scope

of this report and that both the Corporate Health & Safety Unit and health and safety staff within the Education Department would provide support to ERCL through service level agreements (SLAs).

Following brief discussion, in the course of which the Director of Education explained that all incidences of violence were followed up with support being available to both pupils and staff and that all Head Teachers and staff were aware of the Council-wide Accident and Incident Reporting System (AIRS) and encouraged to make use of it where appropriate, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) note the progress made in 2014/15 in achieving the Education Department's agreed health, safety and security objectives;
- (b) approve the health, safety and security objectives recommended for 2015/16; and
- (c) instruct the Director of Education to provide a further report at the end of session 2015/16.

DEVELOPING THE YOUNG WORKFORCE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1691. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 2 April 2015 (Page 1416, Item 1496 refers), when it had been 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, the committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval for the draft Implementation Plan 2015 – 2020 on Developing the Young Workforce in East Renfrewshire.

The report explained that in June 2014 the Wood Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce had published its report, Education Working for All! (EWfA) setting out 39 recommendations to tackle youth unemployment in Scotland. In response to EWfA the Scottish Government had worked with local authorities and other partners to draw up and publish a national seven year implementation plan, Developing the Young Workforce – Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy (DYW) aimed at addressing youth unemployment by ensuring a greater focus on employability within Scottish education for all young people.

It was reported that during school session 2014/15 the Quality Improvement Team had reviewed vocational education within East Renfrewshire and made a number of recommendations to ensure further improvement in the vocational programme. Following the review, the department had engaged with Environment, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), WorkER, the college sector and other partners to address the main recommendations of DYW and to devise an implementation plan which would meet the needs of the young workforce in East Renfrewshire. Within this local and national context East Renfrewshire would take forward DYW through a detailed five year implementation plan which took account of national guidance and the Employability Strategy for East Renfrewshire 2015 – 2018.

The report concluded by explaining that the Scottish Government had made available additional funding at the end of 2014/15 with East Renfrewshire's share being approximately £90,000. It had been indicated that further funding would be made available in 2015/16 although the extent of that funding had not as yet been made known. The funding would be used to support the appointment of a seconded Development Officer to oversee and co-ordinate all DYW activity.

A copy of the draft implementation plan entitled *Developing the Young Workforce in East Renfrewshire – Implementation Plan 2015 – 2020* accompanied the report.

Responding to comments from Councillor Lafferty who expressed concern that the ongoing contraction of the Further Education (FE) sector could have serious implications for the delivery of the plan, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that this had been built into the agreements reached to date.

Having heard Councillor Gilbert commend a recent event following which a number of young people had been offered employment within the hospitality sector locally, the committee agreed to:-

- (a) approve the draft Implementation Plan 2015 – 2020 on Developing the Young Workforce in East Renfrewshire; and
- (b) instruct the Director of Education to implement the policy.

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE AWARD

1692. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education advising of the outcome of the most recent Investors in People Scotland assessment of the Education Department.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement and Performance) explained that an assessor had spent 3 days interviewing a wide range of staff across the service areas in May 2015. The outcome of this assessment had been confirmation that East Renfrewshire Education Department continued to meet the Investors in People Standard and that the number of evidence requirements deemed to have been met equated to the award of Gold Status.

The report explained that the department was committed to providing education of the highest quality and placed the highest value on its staff. This was recognised through the Investors in People Consolidation Report, the executive summary from which accompanied the report. The assessor had highlighted a number of examples of good practice which were listed in the report. It had also been noted that, given the extent of change taking place within the department, particularly in relation to the setting up of the Culture and Leisure Trust, the retention of Gold accreditation had been a considerable achievement.

Having heard Councillor Green on behalf of the committee congratulate the department on this excellent achievement, the committee:-

- (a) noted the significance of the award in recognition of the department's high quality services; and
- (b) approved the approaches taken to ensure the department's ongoing commitment to continuous improvement.

EXCLUSION RATES IN EAST RENFREWSHIRE SCHOOLS

1693. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education informing members of the progress made by the department and schools in reducing exclusions over the past five school sessions from 2010/11 to 2014/15.

The report explained that exclusion rates were a key measure of the success of schools in exemplifying the department's vision statement *Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving*

Through Excellent Experiences. An objective within the department's local improvement plan was to "maintain and where possible improve upon the already low exclusion rates in our schools, especially for looked after children". Exclusion rates were reported on in terms of the number of exclusion incidents per 1000 pupils with three-year average targets for 2013 – 2015 of 13 incidents per 1000 pupils for the secondary sector and 2 incidents per 1000 pupils in primary schools.

Revised approaches to inclusion had been introduced over the past 3 or 4 school sessions and clear guidance provided to schools with a consistent message that all schools were expected to develop a nurturing ethos where all children felt included within an environment which reflected that of a nurturing home. Schools and the Education Psychological Service offered a number of support mechanisms including learning centres, pupil support bases, therapeutic interventions such as Therapeutic Play, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and a Solution Orientated Approach focused on helping young people to develop goals and solutions. The Outreach Support Service worked alongside school staff to help them develop staged interventions to meet the needs of individual children and young people who may be displaying challenging behaviours as well as offering intensive interventions where necessary.

The Quality Improvement Team, supported by colleagues in the Education Psychological Service, had organised and delivered a half-day Head Teacher seminar on looked after children to consider how best to improve outcomes for this group of pupils.

Over school years 2010/11 to 2014/15 exclusions had reduced by 82.3% across the overall school population and there had been significant improvements in the exclusion rate for looked after children with no exclusions in this category in 2014/15. The Quality Improvement Team, Education Psychological Service and Outreach Support Service continued to offer advice and guidance on strategies which could be applied to ensure that this group of young people was included and engaged in education.

Responding to comments from members, the Acting Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) expressed the view that it was better for children and young people to be in school rather than being excluded as this allowed them to remain within a safe environment and to benefit from appropriate support measures designed to address their individual needs. She also confirmed that within East Renfrewshire there was close partnership working between the Education Department and the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) which both adopted a multi-agency approach to child protection and welfare and that a sub-group was currently reviewing the impact of this approach.

Mr Munro commended the progress which had been made over the period covered by the report and explained that teachers were not left to handle pupils displaying disruptive behaviour on their own, citing the provision of nurture rooms and pupil support bases amongst other initiatives designed to address the situation. He did however highlight the often considerable time expended by senior staff in working to minimise the level of exclusions and the impact of this on their overall workload.

Councillor McCaskill commented on the increase in teaching staff absences and suggested that disruptive and violent behaviour by pupils was exacerbating this problem. In response, the Director of Education expressed the view that the link between pupil behaviour and staff absences was extremely tenuous and refuted the suggestion that violence towards staff had led to an increase in staff absences. Referring to the previous meeting of the committee in

June, she reiterated that the Anti-Bullying Policy would be reviewed in the light of new guidance expected from the Scottish Government later this year and undertook to bring the revised policy to the committee for consideration at a future meeting.

Responding to a suggestion from Councillor Gilbert that the report should be shared with parent councils with a view to highlighting the progress being made and further engaging parents in reducing the level of exclusions even further, the Acting Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) welcomed the suggestion and undertook to share the report when she next met with the chairs of parent councils.

Councillor O’Kane expressed the view that there was an opportunity to engage in a wider conversation around the issues of support and inclusiveness, welcoming that exclusion was not used as a punitive measure, and that examples of best practice should be shared with other local authorities.

Thereafter, the committee agreed:-

- (a) to note the exclusion rates in East Renfrewshire primary and secondary schools; and
- (b) that the Director of Education provide a further report to the committee in 2016 following the publication of revised national guidance on bullying by The Scottish Government.

CHAIR

