

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of virtual meeting held at 10.00am on 23 June 2022.

Present:

Councillor Andrew Anderson (Chair)
Councillor Tony Buchanan
Councillor Kate Campbell
Councillor Danny Devlin
Councillor Colm Merrick

Councillor Owen O'Donnell (Leader)
Councillor Katie Pragnell (Vice Chair)
Ms Dorothy Graham
Mr Des Morris

Councillor Anderson in the Chair

Attending:

Mark Ratter, Director of Education; Janice Collins, Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement); Joe McCaig, 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); Leanne Knox, Business Support Supervisor; Colin Hutton, Senior Communications Officer; John Burke, Committee Services Officer; and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

Apologies:

Councillor Gordon Wallace, Dr Frank Angell, Mrs Fiona Gilchrist.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

26. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

CUSTOMER EXCELLENCE AWARD

27. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education advising of the outcome of the most recent Customer Service Excellence assessment of the Education Department.

By way of background, the Customer Service Excellence standard tested in great depth those areas that research had indicated were a priority for customers, with particular focus on delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude. There was also an emphasis placed on developing customer insight, understanding the user's experience and robust measurement of service satisfaction. The previous review of the Education Department had taken place in March 2021 and was carried out on an annual basis.

As a result of the COVID-19 restrictions, the assessor had undertaken the review online and reviewed a wide range of documentary evidence as well as reviewing practice and interviewing staff, partners and customers. The two-stage process of the review was detailed in the report.

The review had concluded that the Customer Service Excellence standard would continue to be awarded to the Education Department. The full assessment report, which recognised the department's continuing commitment to providing excellent services and seeking continuous improvement, was attached as Appendix 1 to the report. It also highlighted 31 areas of 'Compliance Plus', where the Education Department had exceeded the requirements and were viewed as exemplary. This was the same as in the 2021 assessment.

One area for improvement was highlighted, which was a reminder for the assessor to see how much progress had been made in increasing the number of participating students in relation to vocational pathways by the time of the next visit. It was predicted that, with the easing of pandemic restrictions, the uptake of courses would be considerably higher for the following academic year.

Councillor O'Donnell noted the huge amount of work that had been done to maintain standards despite the COVID pandemic. He asked for further information on the data for participation in vocational pathways for the coming year. The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) indicated that the Developing the Young Workforce paper would address that point in more detail, however, as of the May 2022, 533 young people had chosen that pathway, which was slightly below pre-COVID figures.

Councillor Pragnell congratulated the department on the excellent progress in the report. She was particularly pleased to note the support for remote learning for those pupils who could not attend school as this would be a very positive development for those children and young people.

Councillor Buchanan remarked on the high standards and quality of responses received during an incredibly difficult time for Council services. He stated that the report was a testament to the hard work which continued within the Education Department year on year, regardless of circumstances. Councillor Buchanan also praised the ethos of schools and the participation of families, noting that this was an independent report and it was pleasing to see others recognising how well the Council delivered.

Councillor Anderson echoed the comments on remote learning made by Councillor Pragnell. He stated that he looked forward to hearing more about how remote learning would continue in East Renfrewshire Schools.

Thereafter, the committee:

- (a) noted the continuing high standard of the award in recognition of the Education Department's high quality services; and
- (b) approved the approach to ensuring the Education Department's sustained commitment to continuous improvement.

EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE ANNUAL REPORT

28. 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 children.

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.

In 2021/2022, there had been a reduction in the gap to 17%, although it was attributed to an increase in performance of children living in SIMD 1-3 areas and a small reduction in the performance of those in the 8-10 deciles.

Details were also provided on the quality of the early years workforce. Particular mention was made of Career Long Professional Learning and the use of the "0-6 Pedagogy" online hub developed to provide high quality learning materials to staff in local authority and funded provider settings.

Mention was also made of digital applications which had gone live in January 2022. 1022 applications were received electronically and parents were able to accept or decline their place online. Furthermore, work was ongoing to promote the entitlement of 1140 hours early learning and childcare for all eligible 2 year olds, in partnership with Health Visitors, Social Workers and Family First Workers.

Councillor O'Donnell again noted the excellent progress on early learning and childcare delivery. He asked that, given 1140 hours was a relatively new initiative, when was it expected that this investment would have an impact on children's performance in primary schools. The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) stated that, in partnership with colleagues in the West Partnership, the Council was undertaking a joint study to measure the impact of 1140 hours. It was anticipated that progress would be shown when the current cohort of children reached Primary 3. However, it was stressed that the wider benefits to emotional wellbeing, literacy and undertaking study were also important. The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) indicated that a report on the study could be brought to a future meeting of the committee for information. It was also hoped that this work would help to close the attainment gap.

Councillor Buchanan stated that he was happy that the Council had pushed ahead with 1140 hours in conjunction with the Scottish Government. He indicated that the pandemic had

created a potentially huge gap in delivery of services and the decision to go ahead and keep to the timeline would stand the test of time. He looked forward to seeing the results the policy would deliver.

Councillor Merrick reminded members that it was only 5 years ago that this policy came to Education Committee and now it had been delivered ahead of schedule. He stated that the policy could be a game changer and echoed Councillor Buchanan's enthusiasm to see the results of this investment in children.

Councillor Campbell thanked the officers for a very extensive and interesting report. She noted particular references to developmental milestones and noted that in data she had seen, East Renfrewshire was behind 6 other local authorities in those milestones. She particularly referred to Aberdeen City having 97% meeting the milestones while East Renfrewshire had 85%, around the Scottish average. She asked if the Council should not be expecting better. In reply, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) pointed out that there was no national measure for developmental milestones and each local authority used their own suite of tools to examine them. Therefore, it was not possible to benchmark the current data on those milestones against other authorities as it was unclear the same sort of data was being compared.

The Director of Education further noted that a paper had been submitted to the Cabinet regarding the Local Government Benchmarking Framework which included the developmental milestones, which were not currently consistently looked at across different councils. He noted that the Scottish Government was undertaking a consultation on the key measures and that East Renfrewshire Council would be participating in that consultation with a view to allowing this sort of benchmarking to take place.

Councillor Anderson observed that the report referred to a tool being created to track children's development and attainment, which would be used in all ELC settings. He expressed hope that this would allow very accurate knowledge to be gathered for future reports in terms of developmental milestones.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to note the report.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT UPDATE ON DEVELOPING THE YOUNG WORKFORCE AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2022-2025

29. 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.

The report also drew attention to a number of the key highlights from the progress report including the contribution of vocational education to the achievement and attainment of young people in the senior phase. In particular, the vocational facilities at Barrhead High School were highlighted.

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 3 year period. A copy of the updated plan accompanied the report as Appendix 2.

Councillor Pragnell was pleased to note the “no wrong door” approach being taken by the Education Department since she felt many schools placed too high an emphasis on tracking pupils into University education without considering the range of other options that may be better for an individual. Those remarks were fully endorsed by Councillor Campbell.

Councillor Buchanan welcomed the report and all of the work that had gone in to make a fairly straightforward transition to DYW. He remarked that East Renfrewshire had been leading the way in this regard for a number of years and the stage was set for the Council to continue to do so.

Councillor Anderson asked for an update on the number of children entering the Foundation Apprenticeship programme. The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) indicated that 55 young people were involved in the scheme at last count and would likely increase in August and September. She indicated that she could bring a further report on this to the Committee in October for members’ information. However, the Director of Education explained that the figures were already included in the Standards and Quality Report which summarised progress on a year by year basis, and so a separate report was not necessary.

Thereafter, the committee:

- (a) noted the Developing the Young Workforce in East Renfrewshire progress report; and
- (b) approved the updated draft implementation plan for 2022-2025.

REPORT OF THE IMPACT OF THE NUMERACY AND MATHEMATICS STRATEGY 2018-2021

30. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education on the progress and impact of the Numeracy and Mathematics Strategy across East Renfrewshire ELC settings and schools.

Having explained the background behind the Strategy, following publication of the Scottish Government’s *“Making Maths Count Report: Transporting Scotland into a Maths Positive Nation”* and the conclusions of the Education Department’s Numeracy and Mathematics Review in 2011, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) went on to outline the steps taken to improve further the attainment, achievement and experiences of children and young people in numeracy and mathematics across East Renfrewshire.

It was noted that, working with colleagues in Education Scotland and the Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES), a Collaborative Improvement Model had been developed to enable a partnership approach to reviewing progress and impact of the Strategy in terms of learners, staff, parents and wider partners. This enabled a review to take place which would share what worked well and support improvement in identified areas.

The report went on to explain the phased approach taken and overarching theme of the review and the three headings under which the report was structured, going on to highlight the key strengths identified and next steps for further improvement. It was highlighted that East

Renfrewshire was the highest performing local authority in numeracy at P1, P4, P7 and those three groups combined. It was also noted that the senior phase performance was much better than the national average and the Council's virtual comparator.

A refreshed Strategy would be agreed to take forward further improvement in the area of numeracy and mathematics, with a focus on attainment and achievement; learners' experiences; and stakeholders. The report provided further information on the particular areas of improvement being looked at under those headings.

In response to a question from Councillor O'Donnell about the use of Pupil Equity Funding, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) stated that the Education Department was in the process of engaging stakeholders about what they felt would benefit and support them. As a result of that engagement, it was intended to submit a Strategic Equity Plan to the Scottish Government in September. This would be brought to the committee for approval and would take a participatory budgeting approach, meaning a panel of key stakeholders would make the decision on funding. It was hoped that careful tracking would help to identify gaps in learning and support and identify interventions that would have an impact, then measure progress.

Councillor O'Donnell remarked that the Strategic Equity Plan and actions surrounding it were in the future and enquired what was taking place to allocate such funding presently. The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) stated that funding was targeted at where it was required to meet the individual needs of students. The Director of Education elaborated on that point, and stated that the Pupil Equity Fund was £1.4 million, which varied in terms of what percentage of a school's budget it represented. He noted there was an expectation that all schools were focussing on raising the bar and closing the gap and taking a holistic approach to delivering.

Councillor Anderson asked about the timeframe for production of the new Numeracy and Mathematics Strategy. The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) stated that it was expected early in the new school session. Officers had met with a wide range of headteachers and teachers, pupils and parents and it would come to committee for approval in the coming months.

Thereafter, the committee noted the progress of the delivery of the Numeracy and Mathematics Strategy and the proposed next steps outlined in the report.

STANDARD CIRCULAR 6: DRESSING FOR EXCELLENCE – A DEPARTMENTAL POLICY ON SCHOOL UNIFORM

31. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education on the refreshed Dressing for Excellence Policy, attached as appendix 1 to the report, which outlined the approaches to be taken with regard to school uniform, in order to meet the duties and obligations outlined in the Equalities Act 2010, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017.

The previous policy had been presented to the committee in August 2011, to ensure that the excellence achieved by East Renfrewshire schools in the area of their uniform was used as a valuable tool in creating a climate in schools which advanced the Department's vision of Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving, through Excellent Experiences.

The Policy aimed to lend support to schools and parents in setting consistent and high standards for dress codes and promoting a practical and inclusive approach to developing policy on uniform.

It was noted that the Policy was merely guidance for schools on appropriate approaches to introducing and maintaining uniforms. However, each establishment would decide on the format of their chosen uniform, while being aware of their duties to prevent any direct or indirect discrimination against pupils as a result of their gender, race, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion/belief.

Establishments were also to ensure that the uniform could be purchased at a total cost not exceeding that provided within the available School Clothing Grant.

Councillor Pragnell stated that she had been pleased to see the Council setting up uniform recycling schemes in its schools. She raised concerns that some schools had introduced tartan items in recent years and this was driving up the cost of uniforms for some parents. Councillor Campbell endorsed her comments. The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) stated that establishments took a partnership approach with parents and stakeholders when figuring out what was wanted in terms of uniform. However, she reiterated that the guidance was clear that the cost of the uniform should not exceed the School Clothing Grant.

Councillor Anderson noted the Cost of the School Day Project and pointed out that the Child Poverty Action Group were authors of a report on this and it may be useful to circulate to all members of the committee. He also asked if East Renfrewshire schools participated in bulk buying of uniform items to get best price for families. The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) stated that schools used different approaches, depending on how best the items for the uniform could be sourced. However, she pointed out that some parents had found that buying generic uniform items from supermarkets was often cheaper. Schools would signpost to companies where iron on badges and similar accessories could be sourced to allow generic garments to be used.

Thereafter, the committee noted the updated Dressing for Excellence Policy.

FUTURE SPECIALIST ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING PROVISION FOR CHILDREN OF EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

32. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education on a proposal to increase provision for early years and primary children and young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN) across East Renfrewshire.

Having outlined the background to the report, the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) noted that, as part of a desktop review, an ASN data gathering and analysis exercise was undertaken to determine the incidence and nature of additional support needs across the school and early learning and childcare population, which indicated there were between 23 and 28% of school-aged children with ASN.

The review had highlighted many strengths of the existing specialist services and provision, however, it also highlighted the increasing number of children and young people accessing those resources and growing pressure as a result. As a result, it was proposed that capacity of specialist provision be increased for children and young people with neurodevelopmental difficulties and Autism Spectrum Disorder. This approach would enable class sizes to be maintained at optimum levels for supporting young people's needs, while providing enhanced learning opportunities. Further details on how this provision would be rolled out in schools was provided in the report.

A consultation would commence on 17 August 2022 until 30 September 2022 to inform the creation of the new services and the documents relating to that consultation were appended to the report.

Councillor O'Donnell expressed surprised at the percentage of children being diagnosed with ASN in East Renfrewshire's schools. He asked if the reputation of East Renfrewshire Council as having good support for ASN children and young people was driving more parents to want to live in the area to access those services. The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) indicated that analyses carried out by service providers had found that this was the case, though it wasn't the only factor. She also noted the work of psychologists working with families around ASN and the increased likelihood of early intervention that this provides. Councillor O'Donnell asked for further information on the analysis that was carried out if available.

Thereafter, the committee:

- (a) approved the Director of Education to proceed with a consultation on a proposal to establish further provision for children and young people with Additional Support Needs as soon as practicable; and
- (b) requested that the Director of Education provide a report on the consultation at a specially convened Education Committee on 8 December 2022.

CONSULTATION ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GAELIC MEDIUM PRIMARY EDUCATION (GMPE) AT THORNLIEBANK PRIMARY SCHOOL FROM AUGUST 2023 AND BEYOND

33. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval to undertake a statutory consultation on the proposal to establish Gaelic Medium Primary Education (GMPE) at Thornliebank Primary School from August 2023 and beyond.

The Head of Education Services (Performance and Provision) outlined the background to the report, noting that the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 placed a legislative duty on education authorities to promote and support Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE). The Education Department was satisfied that the threshold of requests from families for GMPE in P1 from August 2023 in East Renfrewshire had been met and, subsequently, a full assessment had been carried out and a report submitted to the Committee in February 2022 (page 1769, item 1878 refers).

It was noted that East Renfrewshire's schools had high occupancy rates and there was little scope for introduction of GMPE provision on even a small scale. However, following consideration of multiple factors, it was proposed that future GMPE provision could be located at Thornliebank Primary School, with a catchment area of the Council's boundary area.

The proposed consultation document was appended to the report for members' consideration.

Councillor Pragnell asked if the Education Department was aware of the reason why parents in East Renfrewshire were seeking GMPE. The Head of Education Services (Performance and Provision) stated that there had been small demand in the past, but it had not met the threshold. However, demand had increased. He noted that once the provision was in place, it was likely that more parents would opt for their children to be involved in it. He indicated that it was believed East Renfrewshire had around the national average of Gaelic speakers within the Council area, though there was no documentary evidence of this.

Councillor O'Donnell asked what would happen if the numbers for GMPE dropped below the threshold after provision had commenced and also expressed concerns around the pupil/teacher ratio in such a composite class. The Head of Education Services (Performance and Provision) noted that once provision commenced it would continue all the way through for

the children undertaking it. He stated that the usual trend was that, once in place, the provision became more popular as opposed to less. He also indicated that children from neighbouring local authorities may apply for a place within this provision, with 17 children currently identified. He believed that the class size would be broadly similar to others of the age groups concerned.

Thereafter, the committee:

- (a) approved that the Director of Education proceed with a consultation on a proposal to establish Gaelic Medium Primary Education at Thornliebank Primary School from August 2023 and beyond; and
- (b) requested that the Director of Education provide a report on the consultation at a specially convened Education Committee on 8 December 2022.

CHAIR

