

MINUTE of MEETING of the EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL of WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEST LOTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE on 8 APRIL 2014.

Present – Councillors Lawrence Fitzpatrick (Chair), David Dodds, Stuart Borrowman, John McGinty, Andrew Miller and Jim Walker; Appointed Representatives Eric Lumsden and Myra MacPherson.

Apologies – Appointed Representatives Lynne McEwen and Graham Stormont.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

2. MINUTE

The Panel confirmed the Minute of its meeting held on 25 February 2014 as being a correct record. The Minute was thereafter signed by the Chair.

3. PRIMARY SCHOOL ACCOMMODATION - ARMADALE

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Schools with Education Support which informed the Panel of the pressures on primary school accommodation within Armadale town and outlined the proposals for a temporary solution pending the delivery of additional permanent school capacity.

The report advised that the closing date for applications for school session 2014/15 had passed, however, given the on-going house building within Armadale it was anticipated that applications for placements would continue to be received after the closing date and throughout the 2014/15 school year. The report went on to provide details of the anticipated pupil numbers and class organisations at the following schools:

- Armadale Primary School;
- Eastertoun Primary School; and
- St Anthony's Primary School.

Proposals for managing places across schools in Armadale were outlined in the report.

The Head of Schools with Education Support then advised the Panel that it was proposed to locate temporary leased accommodation comprising four classrooms and toilet facilities within Armadale Primary School grounds. Proposals were to locate the temporary units partly on the grassed area adjacent to the multi-use games area to avoid the loss of playground space and to ensure that the units were less visible to

surrounding properties. In addition to providing sufficient teaching rooms and toilet facilities, this proposal would release four rooms for General Purpose space, in order to support delivery of the curriculum.

In response to questions from members regarding how temporary the situation would be and when the work would be completed by the developers. It was explained that the proposals outlined in the report were for a short term solution pending the provision of the additional school capacity in Armadale. Discussions were on-going between the developer and planning officers. It was agreed that a report would be brought back to a future meeting of the Education PDPS should any material changes in planning circumstances occur which would impact on education services and the delivery of additional permanent school capacity.

Further information was also provided in relation to concerns raised regarding traffic problems in the area and overcrowding in school. The Panel was advised that a meeting had been arranged with the Parent Council to address the issues highlighted to discuss ways to mitigate the situation. Consideration would also be given to pupil travel to school arrangements in order to lessen congestion at the start and end of the school day.

In conclusion, the proposals recommended must be seen as a short term solution pending the provision of additional school capacity in Armadale in order to achieve the education of all Armadale children, within the school of their parent's choice.

The Panel was asked to recommend to the Education Executive the proposed temporary solution for responding to the pressure on primary school accommodation within Armadale town.

Decision

1. Noted the contents of the report;
2. Agreed that a report would be brought back to a future meeting of the Education PDSP should any material changes in planning circumstances occur which would impact on education services and the delivery of additional permanent school capacity; and
3. Agreed that the report be submitted to a suitable meeting of the Education Executive for approval.

4. SEEMIS SHARED SERVICE

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Schools with Education Support providing details of the revised governance arrangements, approved budget and business plan for the SEEMiS Group LLP and the expansion of the shared service to all 32 local authorities. SEEMiS Revised Governance Arrangements and SEEMiS Group LLP Business Plan 2014-2015 were attached as appendices to the report.

The report recalled that in 1997, 12 local authorities entered into a Joint Agency Agreement to form SEEMiS in order to provide information technology solutions to support electronic education administration within council headquarters and school establishments. Since then SEEMiS became a Limited Liability Partnership with 28 full members and the remaining 4 councils in the process of admission.

The report went on to outline information relating to the 2014/15 SEEMiS budget. Membership fees were calculated based on the proportion of pupil numbers from the most recent published figures for each member authority. A programme of investment in infrastructure was approved in 2013/2014 and a hosted hardware strategy implemented for the next five year period. All 28 Councils who were SEEMiS members were included in the budget consultation and the budget was unanimously agreed at the AGM held on 27 March 2014.

The Head of Schools with Education Support then advised the Panel that SEEMiS was in a position to develop as a more effective customer focussed shared service for all 32 local authorities with the potential to expand to other areas of collaboration to secure further local authority and wider public sector best value.

The Panel was asked to note the revised governance arrangements, approved budget and business planning for SEEMiS Group LLP and the expansion of the shared service to all 32 local authorities.

Decision

The Panel noted the contents of the report.

5. EXTENSION TO FREE BREAKFAST PROVISION - PROGRESS REPORT

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Schools with Education Support which provided details of the progress with arrangements to extend free breakfast provision from August 2013 to all primary school children and to those pupils in secondary schools who were entitled to free school meals. Appendix 1 to the report outlined the Breakfast Club Action Plan and appendix 2 to the report provided a Monthly Summary of Uptake for schools in West Lothian.

The report explained that in the school session 2013/2014 budget process the decision was made to make available a further £200,000 to provide free breakfasts for all children in primary schools regardless of free school meal entitlement and for those pupils in secondary schools entitled to free school meals.

The Head of Schools with Education Support advised the Panel that the uptake was very successful with a significant increase in relation to secondary schools. It was believed that this was due in part to the way young people were able to purchase breakfasts as improved software

was available.

Free breakfast provision in West Lothian continued to support children and young people to get the best start in life. The council continued to recognise the importance of breakfast as an integral part of its commitment to ensuring that we get it right for every child. Indicators show that since August all primary schools offered breakfast to all pupils and all secondary schools offered breakfast to all pupils with free school meal entitlement. Overall, the numbers of children with free school entitlement taking up breakfast provision had increased.

In response to an anomaly highlighted regarding the figure recorded in the monthly summary of uptake report in relation to the number of children receiving free breakfasts in Blackridge Primary School for May (1,145), the Head of Schools with Education Support agreed to confirm whether this figure was correct and update Members following the meeting.

During the question and answer session it was agreed that the monthly summary of uptake report would be amended to include the percentage of pupils receiving free breakfasts compared to the school roll and also to identify the number of free school breakfasts available in secondary schools. The amended report should also include a footnote providing details of the improved software available in secondary schools to allow young people to purchase breakfasts.

The Panel was asked to note the progress made to date with free breakfast provision in terms of:

- Free school breakfasts had been provided to all primary school children who wished to access this service since August 2013;
- Free school breakfast provision had been successfully implemented for all secondary school students who were entitled to free school meals since August 2013;
- The Breakfast Club and Food in Schools Group (BCFSG) continued to promote the uptake of breakfasts by children entitled to free school meals and to develop all aspects of food in schools through its action plan. A further update would be provided for the PDSP at the same time in 2015.

Decision

1. The Panel noted the contents of the report;
2. Agreed that the Head of Schools with Education Support would confirm to Members following the meeting whether the figure recorded for pupils receiving free breakfasts in Blackridge Primary School for May was correct;
3. Agreed to amend the monthly summary of uptake monitoring report to include the percentage of pupils receiving free breakfasts compared to the school roll and also to identify the number of free school meals available in secondary schools as well as to include a footnote

providing details of the improved software available in secondary schools.

6. EDUCATION SERVICES MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Schools with Education Support and the Head of Education (Quality Assurance) providing details of the Education Services Management Plan 2014/15.

The report explained that West Lothian Council had identified Management Plans as an essential driver for the provision of excellent services. As such, they were collated and presented at the service group level, which was the collection of Schools and WLAM service units under the responsibility of the Heads of Service – Schools and Education Support and Head of Education (Quality Assurance). The Education Services Management Plan 2014/15 was attached as an appendix to the report and provided information on the services and activities provided; the aims and objectives of the service that were to be communicated to elected members, staff and partners; how success would be measured and the targets that were to be achieved; and the improvement activities that the service was committed to completing in order to change or improve services.

The Panel was advised that pages 2-5 of the Management Plan highlighted the key achievements and priorities of the service in 2013/14.

Finally, the Education Services Management Plan would be utilised by the management team and stakeholders to assess and gauge performance and improvement. The measures, targets and initiatives of each plan were available for management, monitoring and reporting on the corporate performance management systems (Covalent and Initiatives).

Decision

The Panel noted the contents of the report and the Education Services Management Plan 2014/15.

7. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW HIGHERS

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Education (Quality Assurance) advising of the implementation of the new Highers in West Lothian schools for session 2014-2015.

The report explained that the National Curriculum for Excellence Implementation Plan outlined the timescale for implementation of the new Higher courses in Scotland for session 2014/15 with the old Higher continuing to be offered in session 2014/15 for the last time. Both the new and old Higher would therefore be offered by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and would run concurrently for school session 2014/15.

The report outlined the national position which confirmed that although there was a firm commitment to the national implementation timetable for new Highers, Scottish Government recognised the need for schools to determine whether certain subjects should implement the new Higher in 2014/15 or delay for a further year. Ultimately, the decision should be taken in the best interest of the learners. It was noted that the standard of the old Higher and the new Higher was the same and therefore the value of both was considered by colleges and universities to be equal.

The Head of Education (Quality Assurance) then advised the Panel that West Lothian Council was fully committed to the delivery of the new Higher commencing in August 2014 on the basis that this would be in the best interests of the young people currently studying National 5. All schools have been working hard to ensure that young people were well prepared to engage with the new Highers.

Following discussion with West Lothian Head Teachers and individual subject departments, Education Services agreed to a flexible position to ensure that the best possible outcomes for the young people were achieved. The decision to delay the implementation of the new Higher for one year in some subjects due to 'exceptional circumstances' was discussed, which resulted in the large majority of departments opting for the new Higher. Examples of exceptional circumstances were due to capacity within the department e.g. temporary staff, maternity leave or small departments. The report provided details of the overall picture across eleven West Lothian secondary schools of the number of departments intending to follow the old Higher in 2014/15 due to 'exceptional circumstances' which reflected the position across Scotland. Schools were asked to communicate to parents the final position of the agreed situation of the new and old Higher in their schools.

The Panel was then advised of the additional funding that was received from the Scottish Government to support the implementation of the new qualifications. The Scottish Government also agreed an extra in-service day for secondary schools in session 2014/15 for further professional learning with an opportunity for teachers to engage in developing a greater understanding of the new approaches to assessment within the new National 4 and 5 Qualifications and course development in the new Higher. Consultation was being carried out with professional associations and parents to determine the most appropriate date for the extra in-service day. In addition, through discussions with ADES, Education Scotland and the SQA, each local authority would receive additional support through increased professional learning activities.

In response to a question from Mr Lumsden the Head of Education (Quality Assurance) advised that the extra in-service day would be used for developing a greater understanding of the new approaches and once a day had been agreed a group of staff would work together with development post holders and an update would be given to parent councils.

In conclusion, West Lothian Council was fully committed to the delivery of

the new Higher in August 2014. It was acknowledged that there were exceptional circumstances in some subject departments in schools where implementing the new Higher would not be in the best interests of the young people. Full support would be given to all teaching staff from the Secondary Attainment Team, the development post holders and Timetable Group to ensure that all children follow the new Higher in 2015/16.

The Panel was asked to:

- Note the position with regard to the implementation of the new Higher; and
- Note that Education Services would continue to monitor progress of the implementation of the new Higher and that a further update would be provided to the Panel in December 2014.

Decision

Noted the contents of the report.

8. TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2014-2015

The Panel considered the contents of the Timetable of Meetings for the period 2014-2015 (copies of which had been circulated).

Decision

Noted the contents of the Timetable of Meetings 2014-2015.

9. WORK PLAN 2013-14

The Panel considered the contents of the Work Plan (copies of which had been circulated) which would form the basis of the panel's work over the coming months.

Decision

Noted the contents of the Work Plan.