

MINUTE of MEETING of the EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL of WEST LoTHIAN COUNCIL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEST LoTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE on 9 DECEMBER 2014.

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

Apologies – Appointed Representatives Eric Lumsden and Lynne McEwen; Senior People's Forum Representative Maureen Finlay.

In attendance

Kirsty Whyte, Audit Scotland.

1. ORDER OF BUSINESS

Agenda Item 8 – Study Support in West Lothian

The Chair ruled under Standing Order 11 that additional information be tabled supporting Appendix 1, which was not included with the report.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Agenda Item 9 - Implementation of New Highers in Secondary Schools

Councillor Dodds declared a non-financial interest in that his son was employed as a teacher in West Lothian. His son was also a Development Officer for the new Higher in Design and Technology area of the curriculum.

Councillor Dodds also declared a general non-financial interest in that his wife was employed as a Nursery Nurse in West Lothian.

3. MINUTE

The Panel confirmed the Minute of the meeting held on 27th October 2014 as being a correct record. The Chair thereafter signed the Minute.

4. AUDIT SCOTLAND REPORT ON SCHOOL EDUCATION

Kirsty Whyte, Audit Scotland, was invited to the meeting to carry out a presentation and update members on the audits carried out in schools in Scotland to assess how efficiently and effectively councils were using their resources to maximise pupil achievement in schools. Three main objectives were examined as follows:

1. How much councils spent on school education and what they spent it on;

2. How effectively councils were driving forward improvements in pupil achievement; and
3. How efficiently councils were using their resources to maximise pupil achievement.

Kirsty went on to provide members with details of the key facts relating to the attainment gap in Scotland. The audit carried out provided an assessment of attainment over the last decade and identified how effectively councils made improvements during this time. It was reported that when assessing ten attainment levels in schools, West Lothian was one of fourteen councils who had improved their levels above the national average from 2004-2013. Information was also provided on the following:

- West Lothian's spending on school expenditure;
- How councils have reduced their expenditure;
- Spending and attainment;
- How elected members could be better supported to scrutinise performance.

Finally, Kirsty advised members of the future proposals which included attending council committees to present report findings and engage directly with elected members. Information on data and performance would be shared with Education Scotland and individual councils and a formal impact report would be prepared by Summer 2015.

Following the conclusion of the presentation the Head of Schools with Education Support advised that the report provided details of comparisons of National and West Lothian improvements and rates of improvement in the benchmark attainment measures in the National Performance Framework to 2012/13. Data was subsequently considered for 2014 and it was noted that the trend to improve measures in West Lothian had been sustained. West Lothian Council has an excellent record in the efficient use of resources and improving attainment and positive destinations for young people. The corporate plan and education service management plan prioritised improved educational outcomes. The Raising Attainment Strategy commits the council to reduce the attainment gap in performance between and within schools. Improved governance and scrutiny arrangements were in place so that elected members could be more effective in their role of holding education services and schools accountable for securing improvements in performance.

During the course of the discussion the Chair recommended that the Self-assessment checklist for elected members, attached as appendix 1 to the report, be circulated to all elected members for their information.

Decision

1. Noted the contents of the report; and

2. Agreed that the Self-assessment checklist for elected members be circulated to all elected members.

5. PRIMARY SCHOOL ACCOMMODATION - KIRKNEWTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Schools with Education Support providing details of the proposals to decant the pupils at Kirknewton Primary School for the academic year 2015/16 to East Calder Primary School, in order to facilitate the refurbishment of the school building.

The report advised that the aim of the project was to refurbish the school building at Kirknewton Primary School to ensure that the building continued to meet with statutory requirements. The scope of the works agreed within the project included upgrade to the heating system, full re-wiring, asbestos removal and some internal re-configuration to the current accommodation. In order to progress the refurbishment works required it was necessary to decant the pupils to East Calder Primary School for the academic year from August 2015.

The proposal was that pupils would be transported to East Calder Primary School, which had sufficient surplus accommodation for P1-P7 pupils from Kirknewton Primary School. Separate arrangements for the nursery pupils would be provided at temporary accommodation at the local recreation park in Kirknewton, as it would not be feasible to provide transportation for such young children. The accommodation at the park could potentially be utilised in the future as a changing pavilion.

The Head of Schools with Education Support then confirmed that the Head Teachers and Parent Councils of both Kirknewton Primary School and East Calder Primary School were aware of the proposals. The Panel recommended that an update report be submitted to the Education PDSP in February or March 2015 when further details were available.

The Panel was asked to note the options for decant contained within the report for consideration by the Education Executive.

Decision

1. Noted the contents of the report;
2. Noted that the report would be forwarded to the Education Executive for approval; and
3. Agreed that an update report would be submitted to the Education PDSP in February or March 2015 when further details were available.

6. EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE - PLAN TO INCREASE FLEXIBLE PROVISION

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Schools with Education Support providing details of the proposed Plan to Increase the Flexibility of Pre-School Provision, made in terms of Section 50 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

The report recalled that the Education Executive, at its meeting held on 4th February 2014, considered the outcome of the first consultation undertaken under the terms of Section 50 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and agreed to consider the proposals to increase flexibility in future years within available resources including annual incremental increases in funding envisaged by the Statutory Guidance accompanying the Act.

The Customer and Performance Manager then advised the Panel that action had already been taken to extend availability of part-time places within available resources in the August 2014 and January 2015 pre-school intakes. The next consultation would take place in the second half of 2015. Plans to increase flexibility and choice in school year 2015/16 by the introduction of a pilot provision at four establishments (Bonnytown Nursery, Linlithgow, Linlithgow Primary School Nursery Class, Glenvue Nursery, Dedridge and Knightsridge Early Years Centre) based on providing 600 hours of early learning and childcare across two days with attached wraparound care, so that the provision would be available from 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. Monday to Thursday. The provision of the 600 hours of early learning and childcare across two days would avoid the reduction in capacity which would arise from providing it across 2.5 days. The report went on to outline the plans for the delivery of the planned provision, staffing and financial issues.

In conclusion, the proposed Plan to Increase Flexible Provision was in line with Statutory Guidance and addressed the issues raised in the consultation in terms of Section 50 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

Decision

Noted the contents of the report and agreed that the report be forwarded to the Education Executive for consideration.

7. STUDY SUPPORT IN WEST LoTHIAN

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) and additional information tabled to support appendix one to the report, which detailed the range of Study Support activities in West Lothian which supported young peoples' attainment and achievement, providing them with greater opportunities to move on to positive destinations once they left school.

The report recalled that in the last few years West Lothian secondary schools had carried out a wide range of Study Support activities. The purpose of these activities was to improve young people's motivation, build their self-esteem, help them to become more effective learners and raise attainment and achievement. The Study Support activities delivered in West Lothian secondary schools offered new opportunities for learning. Pupils valued the activities and were attending them in greater numbers, enhancing their experiences of school which had a positive impact on their approach to learning. The Panel was advised that there was also a positive impact on attainment for those pupils who attended Masterclass programmes.

In conclusion, the Panel was advised that in session 2013-2014 Study Support activities made a positive impact on:

- Raising attainment in National Examinations;
- Enhancing the ability to learn and develop higher order thinking skills;
- Accessing knowledge and expertise of others, e.g. Homework clubs, Masterclasses; and
- Provided opportunities for pupils whose parents/carers had not attended Higher Education with weeklong attendance at University Summer School.

It was noted that West Lothian Masterclass programmes would continue in session 2014/15.

Decision

Noted the contents of the report.

8. IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW HIGHERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Education (Quality Assurance) which provided details of the implementation of the new Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Higher courses in West Lothian Secondary Schools at the start of session 2014/2015 and the support being given to teaching staff by the Development Postholders.

The report explained that the SQA introduced the new Higher Courses for use in schools and other educational establishments starting in Session 2014/2015 and allowed for an overlapping period where 'old' and 'new' Highers would run simultaneously. The Chair of the Secondary Timetablers' and Senior Attainment Raising Committee (TASAR) advised the Panel that Education Services appointed Development Postholders, initially for one school session, in 23 subject areas. Progress has been made within schools and across the authority to introduce the new SQA Higher courses. Teaching staff were being supported by initiatives to help ensure that these courses met the required standards and allowed pupils

to achieve and attain to the best of their ability. Further work was required to support courses, develop materials and resources and to maintain a firm focus on raising attainment. Development Postholders would continue to work with colleagues in their subject disciplines to assist in ensuring that all staff delivering the new SQA Higher courses were fully conversant with the revised standards, that teaching materials produced were of the highest quality, that resources were shared and used to best effect and that there was a constant and sustained focus on raising attainment.

The Panel was asked to note the ongoing support being given to West Lothian secondary schools to implement the new SQA Higher courses.

Decision

Noted the contents of the report.

9. SUPPORT FOR PLAYGROUPS ACROSS WEST Lothian

The Panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Schools with Education Support providing an update on the development of a new model of management for playgroups.

The report recalled that following consultation with playgroup committees on the management of playgroups, the preferred approach on the way forward for playgroups was to create a single organisation which would take responsibility for the governance and management of all playgroups. Playgroups recognised that if changes were not made, many of the playgroups in operation would close within a two to five year timescale due to a variety of regulatory, governance and financial pressures placed upon parent committees. The development of Bathgate Playgroup was carried out to become a lead organisation known as Community Playgroups, managed by an Executive Board, which strengthened the relationship between the local authority, parents/carers and the third sector to deliver flexible playgroup services within local communities. The Executive Board of Community Playgroups would lead and manage all the playgroup services across West Lothian who wished to become part of the new model.

The Strategic Resource Officer then provided the Panel with an update on the progress made. Three playgroups had successfully transferred into the Community Playgroups organisation from Armadale, Livingston Village and West Calder. Community Playgroups were also in discussion with two other playgroups with the aim of the groups joining the organisation in 2015 and consideration was being given to the best way to develop a setting in the Boghall area of Bathgate. Details were provided in the report of the progress made in relation to the provision of places for eligible two year olds entitled to 600 hours of early learning and childcare within a playgroup setting from the start of the school session in August 2014.

In conclusion, the Panel was advised that the new model strengthened

governance and viability and provided greater universal accessibility to early learning and play experiences. It would enable these services to be delivered by Third Sector organisations to provide targeted early years intervention and improved outcomes for children.

The Panel was asked to:

- Note the progress made in the implementation of the new arrangements; and
- Note the progress made in relation to the provision of places for eligible two year olds within a playgroup setting.

Decision

Noted the contents of the report.

10. WORKPLAN 2014-2015

The Panel considered the contents of the workplan (copies of which had been circulated). It was agreed that an update report on Primary School Accommodation – Kirknewton Primary School be included on the workplan for consideration by the Panel in February/March 2015, when an update would be available.

Decision

Noted the contents of the workplan subject to including Kirknewton Primary School Accommodation update for February/March 2015 on the workplan.