

MINUTE of MEETING of the EDUCATION EXECUTIVE of WEST LoTHIAN COUNCIL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 1ST FLOOR, WEST LoTHIAN HOUSE, on TUESDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2009.

Present – Leader of the Council Peter Johnston (Chair), Councillors Frank Anderson, Gordon Beurskens (substituting for Ellen Glass), John Cochrane, Jim Dickson (substituting for Isabel Hutton), Martyn Day, Robert De Bold, Lawrence Fitzpatrick, John McGinty, Andrew Miller and Jim Walker; Elsie Aitken, Robert Birrell and Myra MacPherson.

Apologies – Councillors Ellen Glass and Isabel Hutton.

Absent – Councillor Willie Boyle and Rev. Dr. Robert Anderson.

1. MINUTE -

The Education Executive approved the Minute of its Meeting held on 13th January 2009. The Minute was thereafter signed by the Chair.

2. ADDITIONAL IN-SERVICE DAY FOR CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE -

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning had announced plans to enable the provision of an additional in-service day in the current school year, and in the next two years, focussed on the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. This followed a recommendation from the Management Board for Curriculum for Excellence which had been endorsed by all members.

The Education Executive considered a report by the Director of Education and Cultural Services (which had been circulated) recalling that during consultation on the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, which had been reported to the Education Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel, one of the major issues raised by teaching staff was that it would be necessary to ensure sufficient CPD (Continuing Professional Development) was put in place. As a result, the Scottish Government had agreed to allocate 3 additional in-service days to support teachers in their preparation for a Curriculum for Excellence.

Consultation had taken place with teaching unions, head teachers and parents through the Parent Council Forum to identify the first additional in-service day. It was proposed to hold the current year's additional in-service day on Monday 15th June 2009. The date had been chosen in order to minimise impact on exams and exam preparation.

Consultation had commenced with head teachers, parents and the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers to identify the 2 further additional in-service days in sessions 2009/10 and 2010/2011. Once the consultation ended prior to the Easter break, the Education Executive would be invited to agree the 2 additional in-service dates.

The Scottish Government would write to all local authorities to set out the terms in which councils would have to write to request permission to close schools for the additional day in order to enable the provision of the additional in-service day. The report explained that despite the additional in-service day being provided at the instigation of the Scottish Government, there was nevertheless a legal requirement to write to request permission.

The Director of Education and Cultural Services recommended that the additional in-service day be approved to support the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence.

In response to a question raised, the Director of Education and Cultural Services gave an assurance that a programme would be drawn up for teaching staff employed in pre-school establishments, which would not close for the additional in-service days, to ensure that teaching staff in pre-schools would receive the same CPD training as all other teaching staff would receive during the additional in-service days.

Decision -

To approve the terms of the report.

3. SCHOOL CATCHMENT AREA MANAGEMENT -

Forward planning and management of school catchment areas was an integral part of the management of school capacity and the school estate. The substantial planned growth of housing in West Lothian will require continual adjustment of school catchment areas in order to establish new schools and also to align school aged populations to available and planned school provision.

The Education Executive considered a report (which had been circulated) outlining the proposed arrangements for the management of school catchment areas in West Lothian from session 2008/09 to session 2011/2012 or later, and the programme of public consultations planned to take place from Spring 2009 onwards to address anticipated changes.

The report explained that the current volatile economic situation had required a re-assessment of the education investment strategy that had recently been considered by the Council Executive. It was therefore necessary to review the related programme of primary and secondary school catchment reviews to take account of the adjusted investment strategy and to incorporate other council decisions that impinged on catchment management issues.

There was a need to undertake school catchment area reviews in order to facilitate growth in West Lothian and to ensure best use of available resources. The report provided full information on each of the reviews

that would be necessary over the next few years.

Formal consultation was urgently required on the site of the new school at Pumpherston and Uphall Station Community Primary school and a review of the non-denominational primary and secondary provision in the north and west of West Lothian. Reports outlining proposals for each review would be prepared for consideration by the Education Executive early in 2009.

The Head of Education (Development) recommended that the Education Executive agree to undertake formal public consultation on the proposed school catchment area management from Spring 2009 onwards as outlined in the report.

Decision -

To approve the terms of the report.

4. PUPIL PLACEMENT UPDATE FOR SESSION 2009/2010 -

There was a need to manage school intakes to ensure quality of provision and to ensure appropriate standards of provision were met for children already attending schools operating above or close to capacity. School intakes had also to be managed in the context of statutory requirements and guidance provided by the Scottish Government to ensure efficient operation of school catchment areas and consistency and fairness in the treatment of all applications to pre-school, primary and secondary schools.

The Education Executive considered a report by the Head of Education (Development) (which had been circulated) advising that to date, 2173 applications had been received for Primary 1 places for August 2009, one of the largest intakes since 2001.

The report explained that children with January and February birth dates had a statutory right to an additional year of pre-school education and, to date, the parents of 130 children in that age group had applied. Applications for a further 211 children were being sought, although a number of those children had possibly left the area. The full effect on P1 placements would not be known until the Early Years Admission Panel had met on 5th March 2009 to consider requests for an additional year of pre-school education, including those of children with September-December birth dates.

Based on the applications received to date, the report went on to list 19 primary schools that were currently over-subscribed by first choice applications and the need to reserve place. 6 of the 19 schools were currently over-subscribed by applications from pupils living within their catchment area. Those numbers were expected to reduce following decisions about deferrals/additional year of pre-school education.

Consultation would continue with Head Teachers in order to accommodate as many catchment children as possible for August 2009. Parents applying for places at the 19 primary schools would be advised of the potential for over-subscription.

The report went on to explain that whilst intake limits for secondary schools had been outlined in previous accommodation studies and reports to committee, it was still necessary to review changing circumstances at schools in discussion with Head Teachers in order to confirm the intake that the school could accommodate without detriment to pupils already in attendance at the school.

2059 applications had been received for S1 places for August 2009, the lowest total since August 2001. Based on the secondary school applications received, 3 secondary schools were over-subscribed with first choice applications. Parents applying for places at those 3 schools would be contacted and advised of the potential for over-subscription.

Reports on over-subscribed schools would be prepared for consideration by the Schools Placement Panel which would meet on 16th and 20th March. There was potential for the list of over-subscribed schools to change as further applications were received or through applications being withdrawn/amended by parents. Other schools could also become oversubscribed once the implications of deciding applications for over-subscribed schools had been worked through. The council's existing Placing in School Guidelines, shown in the appendix to the report, would be used when taking decisions on all applications.

The Head of Education (Development) recommended that the primary and secondary intake limits proposed in the report be approved for schools currently anticipated to be over-subscribed for Session 2009.

Decision -

To approve the terms of the report.

5. STANDARDS & QUALITY REPORT 2007/08 -

The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 required education authorities to report on their improvement objectives. West Lothian Council fulfilled the requirement by the publication and updating of the Local Improvement Plan. The Act also required authorities to report on their success in meeting their improvement objectives which the council fulfilled by the annual publication of the Standards and Quality report.

The Education Executive considered a report by the Director of Education and Cultural Services (which had been circulated) advising of the publication of the 2007/08 Standards and Quality report which showed the performance and quality of Education and Cultural Services for school year 2007/02 and its achievement in relation to the targets in the Local

Improvement Plan 2006/08.

The report fully demonstrated improvements and achievement of high standards of quality across Education and Cultural Services. It highlighted year on year improvements in attainment and good progress against national averages and targets, as well as details of the strategies for improvement employed. The service now evaluated the Impact on Parents as excellent in recognition of the improvements in parental involvement that had been made during school year 2007/2008. The HMIE inspections of individual schools demonstrated the high quality of provision in schools across the indicators assessed by HMIE.

The Director of Education and Cultural Services recommended that the Standards and Quality Report 2007/08 and the pattern of achievement and improvement be noted.

Decision -

To note the terms of the report.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF PLACING IN SCHOOL APPEAL DECISIONS -

The number of placing request appeals had increased in recent years, including those for mid-session placements. The extend of mid-session appeals now warranted timetabling in advance to ensure that Appeal Committees could be timeously arranged and resources deployed to prepare appeal reports.

The Education Executive considered a report by the Head of Education (Development) (which had been circulated) informing members of the implications of recent Placing in School Appeals decisions in relation to mid-session applications for Livingston Village (P1) and Kirknewton (P3) primary schools.

The report provided full details of the circumstances relating to the two recent mid-session appeals for Livingston Village and Kirknewton primaries which had been considered by the West Lothian (Placing in Schools) Appeal Committee on 7th January 2009. Despite the Appeal Committee finding that one or more grounds of refusal existed, it granted places at both schools.

The report advised of the need to manage school intakes in the context of the statutory requirements and guidance provided by the Scottish Government. Intakes must also be managed across all school stages to ensure the quality of education provision for all of the children in current and future years. There was also the potential for material additional and sustained revenue costs in managing the implication of successful placing in school appeals. Finally, the report concluded the importance of ensuring consistency and fairness in the treatment of all applications to pre-school, primary and secondary schools in line with council policy.

The Head of Education (Development) recommended that the implications of the recent successful placing in school appeals on school class organisation options and revenue budgets for session 2009/10 and future years be noted.

Decision -

To note the terms of the report.