

MINUTE of MEETING of the EDUCATION EXECUTIVE of WEST LoTHIAN COUNCIL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 1ST FLOOR, WEST LoTHIAN HOUSE, on TUESDAY 23 JUNE 2009.

Present – Leader of the Council Peter Johnston (Chair); Councillors Andrew Miller (Vice Chair), Frank Anderson, Janet Campbell (substituting for Jim Walker), John Cochrane, Martyn Day, Lawrence Fitzpatrick, Ellen Glass, John McGinty and John Muir (substituting for Isabel Hutton); Mrs Elsie Aitken, Mr Robert Birrell and Mrs Myra MacPherson.

Apologies – Councillors Robert De Bold, Isabel Hutton and Jim Walker.

Absent – Councillor Willie Boyle.

1. MINUTE

The Education Executive confirmed the Minute of its Meeting held on 19th May 2009. The Minute was thereafter signed by the Chair.

2. DRAFT PROCEDURE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ATTENDANCE GROUPS

The Council had endorsed the approach adopted in the Scottish Government publication “Included, Engaged and Involved, Part 1: Attendance in Scottish Schools” (12 December 2007).

The Education Executive considered a report by the Head of Education (Quality Assurance) (which had been circulated) recalling the importance of attendance at school being clearly linked to schools’ overall approaches to promoting positive behaviour and a climate for learning and of the Attendance at School policy which had been adopted by the council in 2008.

The report explained that in a few cases, supportive action through the 2008 policy had not ensured an improvement in attendance at school and advised of the proposal to create Attendance Groups to allow local actions to be applied in order to improve attendance at schools. As Social Policy and Education & Cultural Services both had responsibility for school attendance, the membership of the Attendance Groups would be drawn equally from senior officers of both services

The Head of Education (Quality Assurance) advised Attendance Groups would support parents/carers and families in ensuring regular attendance at school and recommended the draft procedure for the Groups, as detailed in the appendix to the report, be approved

Decision

To approve the terms of the report.

3. AMENDMENTS TO THE EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOL POLICY

The guidance contained in the council's Exclusion from School Policy had been reviewed in light of equalities legislation.

The Education Executive considered a report by the Head of Education (Quality Assurance) (which had been circulated) advising that a full impact assessment of the current Exclusion from School Policy had been carried out. The policy had been revised to ensure compliance with equalities legislation and alterations to the Education Scotland (Additional Learning Needs) 2004 Act. In addition, Scottish Government advice was that ten days should be the maximum length of exclusion in any one period and the policy had also been updated to reflect their advice. The full changes recommended to the policy arising from the review were listed in full in an appendix to the report.

The revised policy would ensure that all schools met the legal requirements in the application of exclusion procedures and would support them in providing a positive learning environment for all children and young people.

The Head of Education (Quality Assurance) recommended that the proposed amendments to the Exclusion from School Policy be approved.

Decision

To approve the terms of the report.

4. WRAPAROUND CARE

The wraparound care service had initially been set up in areas of deprivation in order to support families back to work or further education. The service had been expanded to areas of high demand. At present, the council had 14 pre-school centres providing 284 registered wraparound care places used by around 450 children aged 3-8 years. The service aimed to provide high quality wraparound care integrated with pre-school provision.

The Education Executive considered a report by the Head of Education (Development) (which had been circulated) providing members with an update on the wraparound care service and proposing that a review of the service be undertaken to enable the development of a more sustainable business model.

The report explained that the expansion of the service over recent years had resulted in an increased level of subsidy being required. Efforts had been made to reduce the burden through effective debt management, introduction of advance billing and tighter control of service availability.

The service had also been rationalised over the past two years during school holiday periods to ensure a high quality care experience for children in the most appropriate setting as well as improved financial viability of the service.

A consultation had been undertaken in October 2008 with parents/carers, staff and children in order to put in place the most appropriate structure of provision across the county and ensure effective use of resources. The arrangement had improved the financial position of the service by around £115,000. There was a need to improve the business model to achieve greater financial efficiency while maintaining a high quality service at reasonable cost to service users.

The report concluded by detailing the reasons why it had not been possible to operate wraparound care provision at full capacity and also of the findings of research which had been undertaken with Internal Audit in 2007-08.

The Head of Education (Development) recommended that the Education Executive:

- a. Note the improved financial viability of the council's wraparound care service over the past two financial years due to rationalisation of service provision over school holiday periods where demand was reduced;
- b. Agree that no wraparound care service be provided on public holidays from session 2009-2010;
- c. Agree that a review be progressed to identify greater efficiency in the operation of the service with a view to the removal of the current level of subsidy;
- d. Examine the necessity to link pre-school placement criteria and wraparound care provision; and
- e. Agree that the review and related decisions be implemented for session 2010-2011.

Motion -

To approve the recommendations contained in the report by the Head of Education (Development).

Moved by the Council Leader, seconded by Councillor Glass.

Amendment -

To agree to retain the wraparound care service on public holidays as at present and retain the existing level of subsidy for the service.

Moved by Councillor McGinty, seconded by Councillor Fitzpatrick.

Decision

The motion was successful by 11 votes to 2 votes and it was agreed accordingly.

5. PRE-SCHOOL PARTNER PROVIDING FUNDING LEVELS

Funding for pre-school education places was contained within the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) provided by the Scottish Government to local authorities to help finance the cost of all services.

The Education Executive considered a report by the Head of Education (Development) explaining that between 2002 and 2008, Scottish Ministers had issued an advisory floor rate for pre-school education that set a minimum payment level for each pre-school education place purchased by a local authority from partner providers. Partner funding had been included in the pre-school education sector of the Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) allocation from the Scottish Government, although the use of funding had not been prescriptive.

The terms of the Concordat between Scottish Government and COSLA in 2007 gave local authorities greater flexibility and responsibilities resulting in the Scottish Government having less involvement in micro managing local authorities.

The quality of pre-school education as measured by HMIE and the Care Commission was a national indicator in the National Performance Framework. In accordance with the Concordat, that indicator would now be the focus of accountability, rather than control over inputs such as funding levels. As a result, the Scottish Government had decided that it was no longer appropriate to issue an advisory floor level and that local authorities should decide what constituted an appropriate level to pay partner providers for a pre-school education place, taking account of cost trends in the sector and local economic conditions.

The report went on to advise that in session 2008-09, partner provider funding levels were set at £1590. The Head of Education (Development) proposed that for session 2009-10, partner providers be paid £1630 for each pre-school place, representing an increase of 2.5% which took cognisance of the teachers' annual pay award. The Head of Education (Development) recommended that the funding levels for 2009-10 be agreed and that all future increases to the advisory floor level be directly linked to the teachers' national pay award.

Decision

To approve the terms of the report.

6. SITE OF A REPLACEMENT SCHOOL FOR PUMPHERSTON AND UPHALL STATION COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL – OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION

At its meeting held on 31st March 2009, the Education Executive agreed to undertake formal consultation on the site of a replacement school for Pumpherston and Uphall Station Community Primary School.

The Education Executive considered a report by the Head of Education (Development) (which had been circulated) advising members of the outcome of the public consultation exercise on the site for a replacement Pumpherston and Uphall Station Community Primary School which commenced on 3rd April 2009 and concluded on 20th May 2009.

The report provided a copy of the consultation paper that had been issued to interested parties and details of the four responses received. In addition, minutes of a public meeting held on 23rd April 2009 were also provided in the appendices to the report.

Common points raised during the consultation were addressed in the report which included (i) safety/access on Drumshoreland Road to Site C, (ii) travel to school arrangements for Site C, (iii) security of the school building, (iv) playing grounds and community facilities and (e) timescale.

Although a very limited number of written responses were received, the public meeting generated a high level of support for Site C as outlined in the public consultation document. The written responses also indicated support for Site C. During information consultation with the Parent Council prior to formal consultation, they had expressed the desire to agree Site C for the local of the new school and of the need for a decision at an early date.

The Head of Education (Development) recommended that the Education Executive agree to:-

- locate the new school on the alternative location at Site C as proposed in the consultation document, taking account of the issues raised during the consultation and to progress the provision of the new school at the earliest opportunity
- declare Pumpherston Institute Hall surplus to requirements on the provision of the new school, as previously agreed by the council in March 2005 and refer it to the Property Manager for disposal.

During the discussion, the Head of Education (Development) referred to a late letter which had been received from Pumpherston Community Council. In order to respond to the community councils concerns, the Head of Education (Development) would meet separately with the community council to discuss the terms of their letter.

Decisions

- (i) To approve recommendation 1 as detailed in the report.
- (ii) To alter recommendation 2 and agree that in light of the new location and design of the school, consultation be undertaken with the local communities on the future of both Pumpherston and Uphall Station Institute Halls.
- (iii) That officers consider the feasibility of providing a temporary footpath to Site C from Uphall Station.
- (iv) That appropriate traffic calming measures to address the concerns of parents would be included in the detailed planning application.
- (v) That the Head of Education (Development) meet with Pumpherston Community Council to discuss the concerns expressed in their correspondence.

7. PROGRESS REPORT ON OUT OF SCHOOL CARE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Volunteer parent committees currently managed the independent Out of School Care (OOSC) in West Lothian. Following high-level consultation between the committees and the council, it had been agreed that the sector would benefit from a move to a more professional management structure that would ensure a more robust, sustainable and high quality provision. It was considered that the creation of a single organisation to deliver out of school care would enable the sector to be sustained. The preferred governance structure that had met with stakeholders overall approval was a Social Enterprise: a Charitable Company Ltd by Guarantee. In December 2007 the initial business plan had been developed and secured an outline funding commitment of £750,000 over 5 years from the council and the “in principle” agreement of 14 mainstream out of school care organisation in November 2008 to develop the new business.

The Education Executive considered a report by the Head of Education (Development) (which had been circulated) that provided members with an update on the progress made towards developing the single social enterprise organisation for Out of School Care in West Lothian. The report explained that the Social Enterprise OOSC Working Group had been created and that agreement had been reached on five main areas of the new business including Governance, Staff Management, Financial Management, Quality and Transition. Full details on the decisions agreed by the working group were provided in the appendix to the report.

The report outlined the current position and issues impacting on the development including communication problems between clubs, the changing economic environment and the potential need for new out of

school care clubs.

In addition, an alternative strategy had been investigated to identify a local and successful social enterprise with childcare experience to work in partnership to support the development of the new enterprise and new local OOSC provision. It was anticipated that developing partnership with an existing social enterprise would allow more opportunities to access external funding and offer a higher level of financial and quality management

The Broxburn Family and Community Development Centre had been invited to work in partnership with the council on progressing the OOSC. The Group was a social enterprise that provided support for families to become economically active through adult education, outreach programmes and childcare. Over the last 21 years, the group had worked in partnership with the council to develop a number of key projects across West Lothian. They had shown significant expertise managing and growing a successful social enterprise.

The Head of Education (Development) recommended that the Education Executive approve the development of a supportive partnership with the Broxburn Family and Community Development Centre.

Decisions

- (i) To approve the terms of the report.
- (ii) That a progress report be presented to the Education Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel in 6 months.

8. SCHOOL LINK OFFICERS: PILOT PROJECTS

Projects across Scotland had demonstrated that close partnership working with the Police enhanced the school experience for all children, particularly at the secondary stage. The Officers provided a high visibility presence within the secondary school, its cluster partners and the local neighbourhood. Working closely with staff, officers adopted an early intervention approach in dealing with matters of indiscipline. Evidence from other councils where “campus police officers” had been employed, showed reductions in truancy and exclusion.

The Education Executive considered a report by the Director of Education and Cultural Services (which had been circulated) seeking support for a pilot project to base a police officer in each of two secondary schools during session 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. Bathgate Academy and Deans Community High School had been selected to take part in the pilot project and had been involved in proposing a set of aims for the project, as detailed in the report.

The pilot projects would support the delivery of the four capacities of

Curriculum for Excellence which were to support young people in becoming successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. They would also contribute to improved educational outcomes and improved outcomes in terms of community safety. A detailed analysis of the impact and effectiveness of a similar project in Edinburgh schools was provided as an appendix to the report.

The report explained that the funding of the two officers would be shared between the council and the police. The pilot projects would be reviewed by education officers and senior police officers in June 2010 using performance indicators agreed between the two services, with progress reports at the end of each term to be submitted to the Education Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel.

Finally, the report advised that school link officers would be covered by the normal council policies affecting those working in schools, including disclosure.

The Director of Education and Cultural Services recommended that the Education Executive approve the pilot projects at Bathgate Academy and Deans Community High School to allow 2 full time police officers to work in partnership with school staff and pupils to identify, support and work with pupils at risk of victimisation, offending and social exclusion, and to assist staff, pupils and parents with information on community safety and substance abuse.

Decision

To approve the terms of the report.

9. CLOSING REMARKS

The Director of Education and Cultural Services advised that Pat Sweeney, Head of Education (Quality Assurance) would retire at the end of July. He wished to record thanks to Pat for the fantastic service he had given to the council since taking up his appointment.

In endorsing the Director's comments, the Council Leader, on behalf of the members of the Education Executive, wished Pat a very long and happy retirement.