

MINUTE
of
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minute of virtual meeting held at 10.00am on 3 February 2022.

Present:

Councillor Alan Lafferty (Chair)	Councillor Colm Merrick (Vice Chair)
Councillor Caroline Bamforth	Councillor Gordon Wallace
Councillor Tony Buchanan (Leader)	Dr Frank Angell
Provost Jim Fletcher	Ms Dorothy Graham
Councillor Charlie Gilbert	Mrs Mary McIntyre

Councillor Lafferty 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 Jim McLean and Mr Des Morris.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1873. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

DRAFT STANDARDS AND QUALITY REPORT 2020-2021

1874. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education on the proposed contents of the Education Department's annual Standards and Quality Report for school session 2020-2021.

The Head of Education (Quality Improvement) noted that under the terms of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, education authorities had a duty to produce and publish a Local Improvement Plan, which detailed how the authority and its schools and services would continuously improve. A Standards and Quality Report based on the Plan should also be produced, detailing how the authority had sought and achieved improvements in provision.

The draft Standards and Quality Report, a copy of which accompanied the report, reflected the three key themes of the Education Department's vision statement, "*Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving through Excellent Experiences*". It provided evidence of the progress the department, Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings and schools had made in supporting all learners, with particular focus on inequalities of outcome. It also set out the improvements made toward the four year national priorities as set out in the National Improvement Framework.

A self-evaluation exercise had been undertaken which informed the draft report. It helped to outline the next steps to be taken and fed into the Local Improvement Plan. It also took into consideration the continued challenges, with relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, that had been faced by people in East Renfrewshire. Despite those challenges, the report highlighted very good and excellent standards and practice achieved by the department, its schools and services.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) outlined the range of methods used to gather data and evidence to produce the report. She also referred to the highlights detailed in the report, particularly around Higher attainment and success of the Convener's Awards for Outstanding Achievement which had been held online.

Responding to a question from Councillor Wallace on how the evidence within the report had been gathered, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) explained that evidence was collected throughout the school year, as well as outcomes from learning experiences and examinations. Furthermore, she referred to a questionnaire that had been issued to parents, staff and young people. A remote learning quality assurance activity had also taken place where officers worked with schools to evaluate the quality of online learning. She further noted that partners were fully involved in the evidence gathering work and a range of views were sought, not just from internal sources but from parents, children and young people, and other organisations and stakeholders.

In response to a further question from Councillor Wallace regarding the inclusion of wellbeing within the questionnaire referred to, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) confirmed that wellbeing was included, and was based on the SHANARRI (Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, Included) principles. The responses were triangulated with parent responses to ensure full consideration of the wellbeing of the child or young person could take place.

Councillor Wallace further referred to a questionnaire that was to be circulated in April, which had proven controversial with some of his constituents due to the nature of the questions asked, particularly around wellbeing. He asked what the direction of the Education Department would be in terms of that questionnaire.

The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) indicated that the census referred to by Councillor Wallace had been looked at by the Education Department. A tentative plan had been shared with Parent Council chairs at a meeting the previous evening with a view to gathering feedback from parents. There had been some concerns from a small number of parents, particularly with reference to informed consent and potentially criminalising young people given the nature of some of the questions. There were also questions around the GDPR viability of some of the questions around sexual health. Further review would be required as it was clear that, potentially, the questions could put young people in a vulnerable position, given the data was attached to the Scottish Candidate Number of the pupil and, therefore, was not given anonymously. The possibility of removing some questions that parents found intrusive into their child's personal life was also being investigated. The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) recognised the importance of gathering sensitive data in order to ensuring positive outcomes for children. However, the data should be gathered

in a way that was suitable and took on board the concerns of parents and carers. She also indicated that the Scottish Government had been advised that the April timescale around the census was too tight to allow a thorough review to take place and had advised that East Renfrewshire Council could extend the window until June.

Councillor Bamforth noted that she was pleased to see that the information in the report encapsulated all of the population, not just children and young people. She referred to the purchase of additional ELC hours and asked if this process would take place across all centres. She also asked about the Virtual Nature School, and if it would continue or be expanded. Finally, she asked about mentors in violence prevention. Stressing its importance, she referred to the peer mentoring programme and asked if it was those peers who were delivering it to classes.

In reply, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) stated that there was a shortfall in funding for ELC. Alongside the shortage of staff and impact of COVID, the Council had taken a cautious approach to offering anything over 1140 hours of entitlement. However, where it was available and cost effective to do so, extended hours would be offered for purchase by parents. The Virtual Nature Schools complemented work being done in terms of outdoor learning. She believed that it was going to be extended and hoped that more young people could benefit from it. She stated that, particularly with COVID, outdoor learning had become even more important. Parents and carers had expressed support for this approach. In terms of mentors in violence prevention, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) indicated that the Education Department aimed to scale up the provision across all schools. It was being considered as part of the structured Personal, Social, Health and Economic education provided in schools. A national review was taking place and the outcome of that would shape the provision going forward. Interest among East Renfrewshire's schools was high for this programme. The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) added that both pupils and staff were being trained through the programme and partner organisations such as the Police and Community Learning and Development colleagues had become involved in the training. One school was piloting the "Equally Safe in School" programme and it was hoped to roll that programme out alongside mentors in violence prevention.

Provost Fletcher stated that he was reassured to see the report as it showed that the department continued to perform well. However, he expressed concerns about what he saw as the negative impact of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) on standards. He acknowledged that budget reductions also had a negative effect and asked how East Renfrewshire Council compared to the rest of Scotland in the effect of those impacts.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) stated that the evidence gathered for the report showed that East Renfrewshire had very effective learning and teaching taking place in its educational establishments. This was based on a robust quality assurance programme that had been undertaken including direct observation taking place in the classroom. While there had been challenges, not least due to the pandemic, the overall view from the report was that children and young people in East Renfrewshire continued to enjoy an excellent standard of education. She did note that in many cases, those who had the greatest need had suffered the most disruption and the department was committed to doing all it could to address that and ensure equity for all children and young people in East Renfrewshire establishments.

Provost Fletcher then asked about the possibility of Education Scotland resuming their school inspection and assessment programme. In reply, the Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) indicated that the long term plans for Education Scotland were not known at this time. However, they had attended some schools within the Council area and the feedback received had been very positive and reassuring. Furthermore, the Care Inspectorate had resumed inspections. The Director of Education was part of a group looking at reintroducing

inspections and he indicated that they were unlikely to resume until the next school session. He indicated that a progress report on a focussed look at numeracy and mathematics in East Renfrewshire schools would be coming to the committee in June to offer some assurance as to the quality of education being provided.

Councillor Merrick thanked staff for a very detailed report and highlighted that there was plenty of good news contained within it. However, he expressed concern about the attainment gap and asked what the department intended to do to address it. He also asked for clarification on what the "Solihull Approach" was, as referred to in the report.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) first clarified that the Solihull Approach was a parenting programme based on the mental health and wellbeing of parents and children. She highlighted the department's commitment to equity and reducing the attainment gap. The Education Department was taking a universal approach to support all children and young people, but with targeted interventions where required. The Council would be part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge 2 to give additional resources with a focus on raising attainment within certain equity groups through targeted intervention. Ultimately, progress would come down to working with families and ensuring that children's wellbeing was in a good state and ensuring that the offering in school was excellent in terms of both teaching and environment.

Councillor Wallace then referred to earlier questions in relation to the forthcoming questionnaire and asked when councillors would get sight of the questions to be asked.

In reply, the Director of Education explained that feedback had been taken from head teachers, Parent Council chairs and wider stakeholders, including the Catholic Church, around the content of the questionnaire. He indicated that it would be finalised over the next few weeks and would be made available to members at that time, along with parents, carers and other stakeholders. He stressed that the questionnaire was optional and there was no compulsion for it to be completed. He noted that most of the questions in the survey were similar to things that were already asked, but a small number of the questions had proven controversial. He stressed that anything going out to children and young people in East Renfrewshire would very much be an East Renfrewshire document and not proscribed by the Scottish Government.

Thereafter the committee agreed:-

- (a) to note the content and quality of the annual Standards and Quality Report; and
- (b) to invite the Director of Education to make any amendments and take the necessary steps to produce and issue copies of the report for stakeholders.

DRAFT LOCAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2022-2025

1875. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education seeking approval for the Education Department's draft Local Improvement Plan 2022-2025. A copy of the plan accompanied the report.

The Head of Education Services (Quality Improvement) explained that the plan was designed to give an indication of the department's key areas for improvement over the next three years and was updated annually to take account of changing priorities. Areas of improvement were outlined and priorities would be developed through self-evaluation and information gathered through external evaluations and the implementation of the plan. The draft took account of the current national priority areas, including the National Improvement Framework (NIF) and was

informed by East Renfrewshire's Community Plan. Cognisance had been taken of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Building Back Better and Fairer Framework and the West Partnership Improvement Plan, which set out the areas that the local authorities involved would collaborate on regionally to offer schools opportunities to improve.

The expected outcomes and impact were organised under the department's vision statement of *"Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving through Excellent Experiences"* and had been reviewed and amended to reflect the NIF and the department's ongoing self-evaluation. The plan had a clear focus on improving outcomes for all learners, in line with the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000. The plan also set out how the department would address inequalities of outcome that existed for different equity groups and how it would achieve the priorities associated with the NIF. The timescale for the implementation of the plan was over school sessions 2022-2023 to 2024-2025 and the department would continue to report on progress made with the plan through the annual Standards and Quality Report.

Councillor Buchanan welcomed the report, in concert with the previous report, which highlighted that East Renfrewshire Council did not rest on its laurels when it came to educational excellence. He stated that the report highlighted the successes achieved in a very challenging environment and showed that the Council was not just standing still but continuously looking to improve to give children and young people the best possible start in life. He offered his support of the plan.

Councillor Bamforth stated that she had been delighted to see the family centred approaches taken in the plan, particularly the Healthier Minds initiative. She noted that it had started at just the right time, with its implementation being one month before the start of lockdown. She also noted the department's holistic approach and agreed that there was more to education than passing exams.

Thereafter, the committee approved the draft Local Improvement Plan 2022-2025.

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT AND INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY 2022-2025

1876. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education on approaches taken to meet the duties outline in the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 in East Renfrewshire schools between 2018 and 2021 and seeking approval for the Parental Engagement and Involvement Strategy 2022-2025.

The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that the aim of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 was to ensure that parents were involved with their child's education and learning, welcomed as active participants in the life of the school, and encouraged to express their views on school education generally, and work in partnership with the school.

The Act required local authorities to prepare a Parental Engagement and Involvement Strategy which set out their policies for parental involvement, which was identified as a key driver for educational success in the National Improvement Framework Plan for Scottish Education.

Accompanying the report were a report that highlighted the key achievements and identified next steps based on the 2018-2021 Strategy, and the draft strategy.

It was explained that the Parental Engagement and Involvement Strategy 2022-2025 aimed to build on the achievements of the 2018-2021 strategy and address the next steps identified. It included a range of critical indicators which would be used to measure the impact of the

activities carried out over the period. The strategy would be monitored on an ongoing basis by the Education Department, with progress reported to the Education Committee on an annual basis through Standards and Quality Reports.

Councillor Merrick welcomed the report but highlighted that, particularly in large schools, some parents did not feel comfortable engaging with official channels of communication. He asked if there would be wider parental engagement and involvement to support children who were currently learning at home.

The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that schools had been very creative in their methods of engagement with parents and carers during the pandemic. Feedback had been sought from many families using Google meetings, virtual classroom tours and online learning logs and journals. Not only were these tools useful for the department, but they gave parents instant feedback on their child's learning rather than waiting for parents' nights. She noted that, even when schools fully reopened, the department planned to move forward with a number of the adaptations that had been implemented during the pandemic as they had been useful for parents and widely welcomed. She also stressed the importance of Diversity Champions in schools, who engaged with a wide range of parents and carers. Some diversity groups found it harder to engage compared to others and schools were working on strategies to include and engage with all groups.

Thereafter the committee agreed:-

- (a) to note the findings of the report into key achievements of the 2018-2021 Parental Engagement and Involvement Strategy;
- (b) to approve the Parental Engagement and Involvement Strategy 2022-2025; and
- (c) that the Director of Education support all educational establishments to implement the strategy.

EDUCATION REFORM CONSULTATION

1877. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education on the Council's response to the Scottish Government Education Reform consultation.

The national Education Reform consultation, led by Professor Ken Muir, was published on 30 September 2021 and ran until 26 November 2021. It was designed to seek the views of stakeholders and inform the recommendations relating to the future shape of Scotland's national education agencies, Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA). The process would conclude in early 2022 with the publication of a report by Professor Muir to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

At its meeting of 11 November 2021, the committee noted that the changes to Scotland's national education agencies were likely to have significant implications for education in East Renfrewshire. The committee had also noted the range of forums and consultation events being held by the Education Department during the consultation period to seek the views of stakeholders in East Renfrewshire. Those views were used to form a response by East Renfrewshire Council to the consultation.

As this meeting of the committee was after the end of the consultation period, a short-term working group, consisting of Councillors Lafferty, Buchanan and Wallace, had been

established, to consider the responses from stakeholders and, thereafter, to finalise and submit a response on behalf of the Council. It was agreed that the final response would then be submitted to the committee for homologation.

The response, a copy of which accompanied the report, had been submitted on 26 November 2021.

Councillor Buchanan thanked the Director of Education and the whole Education Department for their work in gathering the views of East Renfrewshire stakeholders which enabled a comprehensive view of education services in East Renfrewshire to be taken.

Thereafter, the committee agreed to note and approve the East Renfrewshire response to the Education Reform consultation and agreed that it be homologated.

GAELIC MEDIUM EDUCATION - OUTCOME OF A REQUEST FOR AN ASSESSMENT

1878. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education on the outcome of a request for an assessment of the demand for Gaelic Medium Primary Education in East Renfrewshire and seeking approval for the proposed approach to the full assessment.

The Director explained that Gaelic Medium Primary Education (GMPE) involved full immersion, with children experiencing all of their learning in P1 to P3 in the Gaelic language. Thereafter, immersion continued, but English was introduced in P4 to P7.

East Renfrewshire did not currently make such a provision available, but families who wished such an experience for their children were supported through provision of transport to attend schools in neighbouring authorities where the provision was available.

Having outlined that the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 placed a duty on education authorities to promote and support Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE) and established a process by which parents could request GMPE from their education authority, it was explained that on 27 October 2021, the department had received such a request from a parent resident in East Renfrewshire whose child was due to start primary school in August 2023. Included in the request were the names of a further 13 children across a range of year groups, whose parents had expressed an interest in GMPE for their children. Each parent included in the request was contacted by the department as part of the initial assessment and 11 provided positive responses. A breakdown of the numbers for each year group was provided in the report it being noted that the numbers met the threshold of 5 children from any one year group.

In response, the department had decided to carry out a full assessment of the need for GMPE in accordance with the statutory guidance.

As part of the full assessment process, the department had notified and sought the views of Education Scotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Comann nam Pàrant and the National Parent Forum of Scotland. The report also outlined the factors that required to be considered as part of the assessment.

The assessment was to be completed by 16 February 2022 and there was an expectation that the education authority publish the assessment report on its website within that timeframe, setting out the reasons for any decision with reference to the mandatory factors in the statutory guidance.

The assessment process allowed the department to seek the views of statutory consultees and, should they be in favour of establishing GMPE provision, alongside sufficient evidence of demand, then the authority would be required to progress with the establishment of GMPE from August 2023. As the next meeting of the committee would not be until after the full assessment process was completed, it was proposed that the Education Committee delegate to the Director of Education the decision regarding the establishment of GMPE in August 2023, taking account of the full assessment process, evidence of demand and statutory guidance.

Provost Fletcher indicated that he was keen to see GMPE available to those who wanted it. However, he was conscious of a previous campaign among a small group of parents to set up a Gaelic school in the past and the names provided to the Education Department at that time were later found to not be interested. He also pointed out that many parents want children to learn Gaelic but not necessarily all learning to be in Gaelic. The Director of Education noted that he had been involved in the request Provost Fletcher referred to, however this request referred to a much smaller number of children and their interest had been verified, as stated in the report. He also confirmed that parents had been informed of what full GMPE looked like and had chosen to proceed on that basis.

Councillor Lafferty welcomed the fact that the Scottish Government would provide additional resources for capital spending and teaching staff in relation to GMPE. The Director of Education agreed that support was available and, should progress be required, the Council would seek to access those resources.

Thereafter the committee agreed:-

- (a) to note the report and outcome of the initial assessment; and
- (b) that, following completion of the full assessment, and in line with the statutory guidance, the decision to establish Gaelic Medium Primary Education in August 2023 be delegated to the Director of Education.

REPORT ON THE EAST RENFREWSHIRE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING REVIEW

1879. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education on the results of the East Renfrewshire Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Review.

The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) explained that a national review of the implementation of ASL in schools had been carried out by Angela Morgan in 2020 and a National Action Plan had been published in 2021 as a result. It considered the implementation of ASL legislation and how it was applied to practice across local authorities.

In response, the Education Department had undertaken a review of ASL within East Renfrewshire with the aim to consider how it could provide high quality support to children and young people with additional support needs (ASN) to ensure that the East Renfrewshire Education Department's vision was realised.

The report outlined the key priorities and core themes of the review and detailed the planned phases of work took place, as well as the key findings from each phase of the review. Based on those findings, a number of recommendations had been made and were listed in the Executive Summary.

A draft ASL Action Plan, a copy of which accompanied the report, had been created to take account of the recommendations, incorporating links to the National Action Plan.

A range of steering groups had also been identified in order to take forward the identified actions, including timescales for implementation and resources required.

The ASL Governance Group would evaluate progress to identify strengths and further actions needed in the implementation of the ASL Action Plan. The self-evaluation and evaluations of services and schools by the department's Quality Improvement Team, Education Scotland, Care Inspectorate and Customer Service Excellence would help to identify impact.

Thereafter the committee agreed to:-

- (a) note the findings of the ASL review; and
- (b) approve the Action Plan to address recommendations for improvement.

SCHEME OF DEVOLVED SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

1880. The committee considered a report by the Director of Education on the collation and publication of the Education Department's Devolved School Management (DSM) scheme and a proposed change to the DSM with regard to the carrying forward of underspend of an establishment's devolved budget from one financial year to the next.

DSM had been introduced in 1993 by the Scottish Executive, requiring councils to devolve 80% of school budgets to head teachers in order to enhance and improve the management of resources at school level. DSM provided head teachers and schools with the autonomy and flexibility to ensure financial decisions, which reflected local and national priorities and were in keeping with the establishments' improvement planning, were made at the most appropriate level – closest to the children and young people. Early Years facilities also operated under DSM.

There was a strong relationship between devolved and non-devolved budgets in maintaining a sound and robust financial strategy for the department and the Council.

The DSM scheme had evolved since 1993 to reflect the changing landscape in which educational facilities operated and greater autonomy had been afforded to head teachers with respect to the Education Reform agenda and, more specifically, the Head Teachers' Charter.

Cabinet had approved a change to the Education Department's DSM scheme in January 2018 which reflected the objectives of the Education Reform agenda, allowing head teachers to carry forward any annual underspend in devolved school budgets up to a maximum of 2% of the school's DSM budget net expenditure. This enhanced the flexibility in school budgets to allow head teachers to plan better for education improvement strategies over a longer period of time and for wider budgetary planning, including targeted savings.

It was noted that in 2019, the Scottish Government and COSLA had updated the DSM principles, building on and enhancing the foundations and principles of previous guidance issued in 2012. The updated principles were aligned with those in the Fair Funding to Achieve Excellence and Equity in Education consultation which took place in June 2017.

The updated guidance issued in 2019 was clear in the expectation that local authorities and schools continue to work in a transparent and open manner, consulting and collaborating with all stakeholders when planning for school improvement and the use of devolved budgets. It was also clear that all local authorities were to publish and make available their DSM schemes, including any details of how the allocation of devolved budgets or staffing was determined by 1 April 2021, extended to 1 April 2022 as a result of the pandemic.

The guidance had been accompanied by a DSM scheme framework which local authorities were strongly encouraged and recommended to use when creating their own DSM scheme. This harmonised how schemes were published, introduced an element of common understanding for users, provided increased clarity and transparency to stakeholders, aided peer review and supported benchmarking.

The East Renfrewshire DSM detailed the Education Department's current approach to DSM budget management and the roles, actions and responsibilities of the various stakeholders. In addition, following consultation with stakeholders, a single amendment was proposed to the carry forward rule for DSM budget and DSM underspend. The proposed amendment would simplify the scheme, whereby establishments could hold up to a maximum of 6% of their annual DSM budget, aligning with the current practice of a cumulative reserve maximum of 6% (3 years of 2% reserves), and the removal of the maximum 3 year threshold. Where an establishment's DSM reserve was greater than a maximum of 6% of the establishment's budget at the end of the financial year (31 March), any additional underspend DSM budget would revert to the Council's General Reserve.

The proposed change would continue to align with the current annual 2% reserve amount (for a maximum of 3 years), simplify the DSM carry forward policy and reduce administrative burden, providing establishments with greater flexibility for future financial planning.

Thereafter the committee agreed to note:-

- (a) that the Devolved School Management Scheme would be presented to Cabinet for approval in due course; and
- (b) the publication of the Education Department's Devolved School Management Scheme, in accordance with national guidance.

CHAIR