

MINUTES

A & B

Education and Families Committee
Room 10, Islesburgh Community Centre, Lerwick
Wednesday 15 June 2011 at 10.00am

Present:

E L Fullerton	L Angus
L F Baisley	A J Cluness
F B Grains	I J Hawkins
W H Manson	C H J Miller
R C Nickerson	J G Simpson
J W G Wills	

Also:

G Robinson

Apologies:

None

In Attendance

H Sutherland, Executive Director - Education and Social Care
H Budge, Head of Schools
S Morgan, Head of Children's Services
J Riise, Head of Legal and Administration
A Cogle, Service Manager – Administration
E McGregor, Communications Officer
J Reyner, Quality Improvement Manager
M Thomson, Senior Assistant Accountant
L Geddes, Committee Officer

Chairperson

Mrs E L Fullerton, Chair of the Committee, presided.

Circular

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

Declarations of Interest

Mr Angus declared an interest in Agenda Item 1 – Blueprint for Education in Shetland: Olnafirth Primary School – as his granddaughter is a pupil there. However, having sought advice from Legal and Administration, he had been advised that it was appropriate for him to speak as the recommendations in the report with regard to Olnafirth Primary School relate only to the timing of the consultation exercise.

The minutes of the meeting of the Services Committee held on 5 May 2011, and the Special Services Committee meeting held on 10 May 2011, having been circulated, were confirmed.

02/11

Blueprint for Education in Shetland: Olnafirth Primary School Consultation

A report by the Head of Schools (Report No: ED-10-F2) requested approval to suspend the consultation on the proposed closure of Olnafirth Primary School until at least August 2012. This request followed a letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning asking Local Authorities to put a Moratorium on Rural School Closures.

The Head of Schools advised that COSLA had issued a press statement in relation to this request and would be considering it further at its Convention meeting the following week. However COSLA were of the view that the request undermined local government's careful management of rural education. In response to a query, she confirmed that should the recommendations be approved and consultation on Olnafirth delayed, staff in the Schools Service could start progressing a number of other aspects of the Blueprint instead.

During the lengthy discussion that followed, some Members commented that the consultation on Olnafirth was not a new process but was instead the continuation of a process that had already been approved and had commenced some time ago. Any delay would not only add to uncertainty in the community, but would impact on the whole Schools Service. It was noted that whilst it was requested that local authorities did not propose rural schools for closure, it did not specifically state that they should not continue to carry out consultation. It was pointed out that the Council would not be making any proposals regarding Olnafirth until the consultation process had been completed. Concern was expressed that the delay would end up being much more than a year, as new legislation may be required as a result of the findings of the new Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education (the Commission), and at the impact that this potential delay would have on the Blueprint for Education proposals.

Other Members felt that the Committee should support the request from the Cabinet Secretary. Concern was expressed that should Members not agree to the request and continue with the consultation process, it could be an abortive exercise and waste a lot of staff time should the Commission decide to make changes to the consultation process, or if Ministers called in the decision because any new process had not been correctly followed. It was felt that it would be a better use of officers' time to proceed with other aspects of the Blueprint that required to be considered, and it was suggested that it would be beneficial for communities if the Commission did reassess the closures process as was intended.

The Head of Schools said that whilst the statutory consultation process with regard to Olnafirth had commenced some time ago, she anticipated that the Cabinet Secretary would view it as a new proposal, and would have the ability to call in any decision. There was also a danger that the Commission may make changes to the consultation process that could render any consultation carried out by the Council beforehand invalid.

The Head of Legal and Administration added that whilst the call for a moratorium was outwith the legal regime, practical considerations still had to be taken into account. Whilst it was possible that staff time may end up being wasted should the decision be to proceed with the consultation, the letter did not cover how the Scottish Government would determine proposals that were presented that did comply with the law. He added that the recommendations in the report and any departure from existing Council policy required a decision of the Council, and that it would be helpful for the Committee to give the matter some wider political consideration. This would give any Member representing the Council at the CoSLA Convention a steer as to the Council's position. By the time the Council considered its policy position, it would have some direction from the CoSLA Convention meeting.

Members expressed their dissatisfaction at the way in which the Scottish Government could be seen to be interfering in local affairs, and expressed concern that this could ultimately result in attempts to centralise education authorities.

It was questioned if the Council would be asked to give evidence to the Commission. The Head of Schools explained that it was not yet clear how it would be set up, but that it would be useful for someone from the Council to be represented on the Commission.

Members agreed that they would consider a political stance to be taken in terms of any current representation to be made by Council representatives at CoSLA or other meetings following consideration of this item. Members also agreed that they would wish to have representation on the Commission.

Dr Wills moved that the Committee:

- do not agree to request from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to implement a moratorium on proposed new rural school closures
- do not agree to the proposal to postpone the statutory consultation on the proposed closure of Olnafirth Primary School until at least August 2012
- request that Shetland is represented on the new Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education

Mrs Grains seconded.

Mr Cluness moved, as an amendment, that the Committee approve the recommendations in the report, namely:

- agree to request from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to implement a moratorium on proposed new rural school closures
- agree to the proposal to postpone the statutory consultation on the proposed closure of Olnafirth Primary School until at least August 2012
- agree that if Statutory Consultation is necessary after August 2012, authority be delegated to the Head of Schools to arrange to do that under the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and any amendments to that Act.

Mr Cluness confirmed that he was also willing to include in his amendment the request that Shetland is represented on the new Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education.

Mrs Miller seconded.

It was noted that should the amendment be successful, the Committee would require to make a recommendation to the Council as it would have to agree to the change of timescale for the consultation process.

Mr Nickerson and Mr Manson gave notice of further amendments.

After summing up, voting took place by show of hands and the result was as follows:

Amendment (Mr Cluness)	6
Motion (Dr Wills)	2

Mr Angus, Mr Nickerson and Mr Manson requested that their abstentions be noted.

Mr Nickerson moved, as an amendment, that:

- The Committee do not agree to the request from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to implement a moratorium on proposed new rural school closures
- The Committee agree to the proposal to postpone the statutory consultation on the proposed closure of Olnafirth Primary School pending the outcome of the discussion of the new Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education and any decision taken at that point
- The Committee agree that if Statutory Consultation is necessary, authority be delegated to the Head of Schools to arrange to do that under the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and any amendments to that Act
- The Committee seek to give evidence to the Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education and have a Shetland representative on the Commission

Dr Wills seconded.

After summing up, voting took place by show of hands and the result was as follows:

Amendment (Mr Nickerson)	4
Motion (Mr Cluness)	6

Mr Angus asked that his abstention be noted.

Mr Manson withdrew his notice of further amendment.

Decision:

The Committee **RECOMMEND** that Shetland Islands Council:

1. agree to request from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to implement a moratorium on proposed new rural school closures
2. agree to the proposal to postpone the statutory consultation on the proposed closure of Olnafirth Primary School until at least August 2012
3. agree that if Statutory Consultation is necessary after August 2012, authority be delegated to the Head of Schools to arrange to do that under the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and any amendments to that Act
4. request that Shetland is represented on the new Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education

Discussion then took place regarding the political stance to be taken by the Council in relation to the letter from the Cabinet Secretary. The Committee agreed to advise that the Council was seeking reassurance and clarification from the Government as to where the centre of power for decision-making on matters relating to educational provision should be, and that the Council is strongly of the view that such power should remain at a local level, along with necessary funding.

(Dr Wills and Mr Cluness left the meeting)

03/11

Planning and Performance Management Framework: Summary Workplan

A report by the Executive Director – Education and Social Care presented the summary workplans, to set the scene for the Education and Families Committee's Planning and Performance Management Framework (PPMF), and to enable the Committee to consider the work plan and performance measures for the services within their remit in order to determine the relative priority and targets to deliver for the year ahead.

During the discussion that followed, the Committee noted the following issues:

Children's Services:

Childcare

Whilst not part of the statutory remit, this was a very important part of the service. Much work and discussion had already taken place with relevant stakeholders with regard to developing the childcare strategy, and this would continue. A seminar would be held to consider the main issues, and a report would be presented to the Committee in August.

Corporate Parenting

It was agreed that the emphasis on the importance of this should continue to be developed and strengthened.

Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

It was agreed that this approach should continue to be actively promoted and strengthened as best practice.

Schools Service:Education

It was acknowledged that there were a wide range of challenges that would impact on education over the coming year, and it was agreed that a seminar should be planned over the next few months in order to discuss these issues.

ICT

It was noted that the Schools Service are continuing to explore and develop innovative ways of delivering education.

Asset Strategy

This was being developed and it was agreed that it was important for both the Council and the community that property was being used effectively.

(Mr Simpson and Mr Angus left the meeting)

Skills and Learning Partnership:

It was recognised that efforts were being made to ensure positive destinations for young people. The Partnership will continue to oversee the work of the Curriculum for Excellence, 16+ Learning Choices and More Choices, More Chances Groups to ensure that young people have access to their learning entitlement and that they are equipped with the skills necessary to achieve a positive destination. Work will continue to monitor and assess performance against the indicators that are included in the Smarter arm of the Single Outcome Agreement.

Lifelong Learning Service:

It was noted that work was continuing towards the establishment of a Chair in Creative Industries for UHI to be based in Shetland College.

On the motion of Mrs Miller, seconded by Mr Nickerson, the Committee approved the recommendations in the report.

Decision:

The Committee **RECOMMENDED** that:

1. the Summary Service Statements appended to the report are noted
2. the documents as the workplan to develop policy initiatives and manage performance over the next period are approved.

The meeting concluded at 1.30pm