



MINUTES

A & B

Education and Families Committee
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lerwick
Wednesday 29 August 2012 at 10.00am

Present:

Councillors:

V Wishart	G Smith
P Campbell	G Cleaver
B Fox	A Manson
F Robertson	G Robinson
D Sandison	M Stout

Religious Representatives:

T Macintyre	R MacKay
M Tregonning	

Also:

M Burgess	A Cooper
S Coutts	A Duncan
R Henderson	C Smith
T Smith	A Wishart

Apologies:

None

In Attendance:

H Budge, Director of Children's Services
A Edwards, Executive Manager – Quality Improvement
J Gray, Executive Manager – Finance
J Riise, Executive Manager – Governance and Law
S Thompson, Executive Manager – Schools
C Anderson, Senior Communications Officer
A Cogle, Team Leader - Administration
K Johnston, Solicitor
J Thomason, Management Accountant
L Geddes, Committee Officer

Chairperson

Ms Wishart, Chair of the Committee, presided.

Circular

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair welcomed the newly appointed religious representatives, Ms MacKay and Mr Tregonning, to the meeting.

16/12 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2012 were confirmed on the motion of Mr Stout, seconded by Mr Campbell.

17/12 **Management Accounts for Education and Families Committee: 2012/13 – Quarter 1 (April 2012 – June 2012)**

The Committee considered a report by the Executive Manager - Finance (Report No: F-034-F), which provided an opportunity to review the financial performance of services within the remit of the Committee for the first quarter.

The Executive Manager - Finance advised that this was the first in a series of reports that would be looking at the projected outturn position, and it should be recognised that this was difficult to determine in the first quarter. He went on to say that good progress had been made, with £1.5million of the required £1.9million savings required being delivered so far, and work was underway to deliver the remaining £492,000. The projected outturn showed an overspend of £0.020million, and action was required to address this.

In response to a query regarding how the projected outturn figures were arrived at, he advised that this relied on finance staff working with those in the directorate. Staff in the service areas were best placed to understand what would be coming up over the coming year, and the figures were based on their professional judgement.

In response to a further query, the Director of Children's Services advised that £6.25million savings had to be found next year, and that the £1.9million approved recurring savings were in addition to that. She outlined the ways in which these recurring savings had been made so far, and advised that a broader breakdown for services referred to in the report, but outwith her directorate, could be supplied if required.

In moving that the recommendations in the report be approved, Mr Smith acknowledged the exceptional work carried out by the Director of Children's Services, her staff and Finance Services staff for the work they had carried out in coming to this position.

Mr Robinson seconded.

Decision:

The Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- review the Revenue Management Accounts, from 1 April 2012 – 30 June 2012, including the projected outturn position and savings in the year

18/12 **Statutory Consultation – Olnafirth Primary School**

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services (Report No: CS-16-12-F), which informed Members of the current advice from the Scottish Government and COSLA on rural school closures as a result of the Commission on Rural Education delaying the publication of its final report until the end of 2012 at the earliest.

The Director of Children's Services advised that a forthcoming appeal in the Court of Session that was relevant to rural school closures and the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 would be considered before the end of the year. The Commission on Rural Education required to consider the outcome of this appeal, and would therefore not be reporting before the end of the year. Both COSLA and the Scottish Government were advising local authorities that they were free to progress with consultation on school closures if they wished, however they would need to weigh up the political, legal and practical challenges of doing so. It was therefore recommended that any further reporting would be carried out as part of the Refresh of the Blueprint for Education, and it was recognised that this would mean a further period of anxiety for the school and the community.

In response to a query, she confirmed that whilst it was legally possible to proceed with the statutory consultation, COSLA were asking local authorities to think carefully about any political, legal and practical considerations in doing so. The proposed closure of Olnafirth Primary School, which was being considered as part of the following item on the agenda, was scheduled for statutory consultation in 2013, with a proposed transfer date of August 2014.

On the motion of Mr Smith, seconded by Ms Manson, the Committee approved the recommendations in the report.

Decision:

The Committee **RECOMMENDED** that the Council resolve to:

- Further postpone the statutory consultation on the proposed closure of Olnafirth Primary School until after the Commission on Rural Education has reported its findings; and
- Note that this would not prevent further reporting on the future of Olnafirth Primary School as part of the Refresh of the Blueprint for Education.

19/12

Refresh of the Blueprint for Education

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services (Report No: CS-18-12-F), which detailed the Children's Services Refresh of the Blueprint for Education that Shetland Islands Council had tasked Children's Services with undertaking in February 2012.

The Chair advised that the report put forward a plan for delivering education in Shetland up to 2017, and she believed such a plan was essential in order to ensure affordable and sustainable best-quality education in Shetland into the future. She felt that there were a number of misunderstandings regarding the report, and advised that it was a working document that would deal with each proposed change individually. Consultation on the proposals would not proceed until full proposals with detailed costings were in place. However concerns had been expressed that the financial information in the report was indicative and incomplete, and she was concerned that it would therefore not be possible to have a competent discussion at today's meeting.

Mr Smith requested that appreciation of the work of the Director of Children's Services and her staff be recorded for the work carried out in the short time they had been tasked to deal with this. He went on to say that he believed there was a requirement for a plan to take account of not just education, but the Council as a

whole. He was in no doubt at the seriousness of the Council's financial position, and felt that radical and considered action was required to get the budget under control, whilst ensuring delivery of the best possible front-line services. Whilst he felt that the plan before Members was a move in the right direction, he was concerned that it did not have the full financial information that was required. The detailed savings that could be found in the education budget were just part of a wider picture, as there were other costs that would fall on the Council such as additional transport costs. He therefore moved that a decision on the report be deferred today, and that the further financial information required be sought in order that the report could be considered by the Council at its meeting on 20 September.

Reverend Macintyre seconded.

Mr Cleaver moved, as an amendment, that a decision on the report be deferred today, and that the further financial information required be sought in order that the report could be considered by the Education and Families Committee at its next available meeting.

Mr Fox seconded, adding that he would like to include in the amendment that as well as the inclusion of further financial information, detail be included how the travel times being suggested would be achieved. This could include an example of the furthest away children from the schools, and what would need to be put in place for them. Mr Cleaver agreed to include this in his amendment.

After hearing Mr Cleaver's amendment, Reverend Macintyre withdrew his seconding of Mr Smith's motion, and Mr Robinson instead seconded Mr Smith's motion.

A Member pointed out that the Council was due to debate its financial plan on 20 September and if consideration of the report was deferred beyond this date, the Council would have to put back its medium-term financial plan. Therefore it would be appropriate for the Committee to consider the report before the Council meeting on 20 September.

The Chair pointed out that it would be possible to hold a special Education and Families meeting prior to the Council meeting.

The mover of the motion agreed that the terms of the amendment would be acceptable to him, and there was general agreement that the terms of the amendment were acceptable. Therefore the Committee agreed the consensus view that the report, with the additional information requested by Members, should be presented to a special Education and Families meeting to be held prior to 20 September.

It was further requested that as some of the proposals in the report related to the completion of the new Anderson High School, further information relating to this project should be included in the report. The Director of Children's Services advised that she would include this.

During the discussion that followed, concern was expressed that Members would be doing the community a disservice by deferring consideration of the report. Other Members felt that it was important that more accurate indicative costs and the effect on other areas of the Council were taken into consideration, as the lack

of detailed financial information was causing concern for the public. Members also commented on the need for the Council to carry out socio-economic studies in conjunction with the Blueprint, and the need for the Council to have a clear policy and vision of the way forward, including the setting of priorities and assessment of where cuts should fall.

Decision:

The Committee **RESOLVED** that:

A decision on the report be deferred, and that the additional financial information requested by Members in relation to additional financial costs and travel times be sought, in order that the report can be presented at a special Education and Families meeting prior to the meeting of Shetland Islands Council on 20 September.

20/12

Children's Services Quarter 1 Performance Overview

A report by the Director of Children's Services (Report No: CS-17-12-F) summarised the activity and performance of Children's Services for the first quarter of 2012/13, against the objectives and actions in the Children's Services Directorate Plan.

The Director of Children's Services advised that although the Sport and Leisure Service did not come under the remit of this Committee, it was included in the report as it came under the Children's Services directorate. In response to a query, she outlined the range of performance measures that were used to measure progress, and said that she felt it was important to have improvement plans in place as they were very useful for helping to monitor progress and take activity forward.

A Member expressed concern at the potential for duplication of services provided to young people by the Council and the third sector, and queried if the development of the Youth Strategy would encompass this.

The Director of Children's Services advised that a review of youth work was also being carried out, and it was important that both linked together. The reviews would also consider making best use of resources and avoiding duplication.

A Member enquired how it was intended to achieve the increase in pre-school hours required by the Government, given that additional funding to support this was not being provided.

The Director of Children's Services advised that the increase in pre-school hours also meant that the Council would have to offer more flexible hours. These would not be restricted to term times only, as was currently the case. A working group was currently looking at how to progress this. One of the ways it could be achieved would be having classes run by Early Years Workers rather than teachers.

Decision:

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

Before the meeting concluded, the Executive Manager – Governance and Law advised that a date of 14 September 2012 at 10.00am had been set for the Special Education and Families Committee meeting.

The meeting concluded at 11.00am.

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Chair