

**Special Shetland Islands Council
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lerwick
Monday 9 June 2014 at 2.00 pm**

Present:

M Bell	M Burgess
P Campbell	G Cleaver
A Cooper	S Coutts
A Duncan	B Fox
R Henderson	A Manson
D Ratter	F Robertson
G Robinson	D Sandison
C Smith	G Smith
T Smith	M Stout
J Wills	A Wishart
V Wishart	

Apologies

A Westlake

In Attendance (Officers):

M Boden, Chief Executive
H Budge, Director of Children's Services
M Craigie, Executive Manager – Transport Planning
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
T Coutts, Project Manager
K Johnston, Solicitor
L Geddes, Committee Officer

Chair:

Mr M Bell, Convener of the Council, presided.

Circular:

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

Declarations of Interest

None

41/14 **Proposed Discontinuation of Secondary Three and Secondary Four Education at Sandwick Junior High School**

The Council considered a report by the Director of Children's Services (CS-12-14-F) which presented the Consultation Report on the proposed discontinuation of Secondary 3 and Secondary 4 education at Sandwick Junior High School.

The Director of Children's Services introduced the report, thanking all those who had taken time to participate in the consultation exercise. She confirmed that the process had followed the statutory requirements of the Schools (Consultation)

(Scotland) Act 2010, and that the consultation period had run from 13 February to 28 March 2014. Education Scotland had prepared a report on the educational aspects of the Proposal, having received a copy of the proposal paper, all relevant written responses and a summary of the oral responses.

She advised that an error had been pointed out on page 18 and in Section 22.22 of the conclusion section of the Consultation Report, where it should read that the figure that disagreed with the proposal was 78.16% rather than 80.2%. The covering report for the Committee, Executive Summary and the online version of the Report had all been corrected when this error was discovered.

She went on to say that the majority of respondents had disagreed with the proposal, with only five responses agreeing with it. The concerns expressed included travelling distance and times, transport costs, quality of education, child safety, out of school activities, class sizes, community concerns, transition issues, relationships/friends and family life, school capacity, condition of building, staffing implications/employment issues, timescale of programme, democratic/decision making process, centralisation, finance, untested model of provision, environmental issues, equality of provision, removal of choice and learning resources. Detailed responses to each of these areas of concern were set out in the report, with pupil and staff queries and concerns set out separately from other responses.

Education Scotland had raised a number of relevant points which were included in the report, and she drew Members' attention to two of these. Firstly, there was a view that the Council had not set out a convincing case that the discontinuation of S3 and S4 was the most reasonable and viable option. Secondly, Education Scotland had stated that "the Council has made a clear case that for reasons of financial sustainability and the need to develop a coherent senior phase for young people which meets their diverse needs and aspirations, the current arrangement of providing education for the S1 to S4 stages at Sandwick Junior High School is neither viable nor in the best interests of children and young people".

Consultees and Education Scotland had expressed concern at the timing of the transition happening prior to the new Anderson High School (AHS) opening, which would necessitate two transitions for pupils from Sandwick JHS. She had responded to these concerns by recommending that changes do not take place until August 2016, accepting that this was something that would require financial consideration in the meantime.

A number of things had changed since the beginning of the year in relation to secondary education and, importantly, the first tranche of S4 pupils had now been through the N4 and N5 qualifications. As the weekend's event had shown, a large number of people across Shetland cared deeply about education. The Curriculum for Education (CfE) in secondary education was bringing changes, and she was very aware that parents and pupils were being asked to respond to expected changes that were perhaps not yet fully apparent to everyone. She was pleased to confirm that the Shetland Learning Partnership Project was now up and running, and plans were well advanced to offer a wide range of opportunities for Senior Phase pupils, both vocational as well as academic. For example, from next summer there would be the opportunity, on a pilot basis, for some pupils to undertake a part-time HNC course at College whilst at either of the High Schools.

She concluded by saying that it was her professional duty to point out that she remained convinced that S1 to S6 schools offered the best secondary education

opportunities for young people, and were the best fit with CfE. Shetland's model of secondary education was no longer fit for purpose, and the Shetland Learning Partnership was predicated on the Senior Phase being delivered in two High Schools. Given the geography of Shetland, there would always be a need for a transition point for some pupils at some point during their secondary education. She could not recommend to the Committee that the current arrangements, where pupils move school in the midst of their Senior Phase, were wise. Given that the only other option explored for Sandwick was to change to an S1 to S2 department, that was what was being recommended to the Committee. She advised that she was doing so with some reluctance because she knew from the feedback received that it was not a popular choice and, significantly, she believed that pupils should be able to attend an S1 to S6 school. If that was not possible geographically, pupils should at least have an intact Senior Phase and, if possible, no disruption to their Broad General Education which would take them up to the end of S3. Nevertheless, a transition at the end of S2 was better than a transition at the end of S4, and given that these were the only two options in the report, she had made the recommendation for a change to S1 to S2.

The Director of Children's Services then responded to questions, and Members noted the following:

- To meet its savings target, Children's Services required to find savings of £800,000 this year, £700,000 the following year, and £1.7million the year after. Currently Children's Services was on track to meet this target, but there may need to be reconsideration of some of the savings that had to be found over the following two years.
- If the recommendation from the Education and Families Committee was approved, the updated financial implications would be presented to Members in the report requested by Members regarding education costs per pupil in Shetland. This report would include detailed costings.
- There would be a budgetary implication for all other schools if secondary education was continued in Sandwick. It was not anticipated that the level of savings that was currently required would have an impact educationally on pupils at the moment, but further information would be presented to Members in the aforementioned report.
- No specific detailed proposals as to where alternative savings could be made had been received from Members or through the consultation process.
- The latest figures regarding the cost per pupil had been presented to the Audit Committee at its meeting on 27 May. The figures in that report stated that the cost in 2012/13 per primary pupil was £8,527 and the cost per secondary pupil was £13,657. In comparison with Orkney and the Western Isles, as per the National Benchmarking Overview Report 2014, this meant that the cost in Shetland was around £3,000 higher for secondary pupils. Primary pupil costs were more in line with each other, although Shetland was still the highest of the three. Members had requested further information regarding the disparity in costs, and this would be detailed in the report to be presented.
- The Council had already made a decision to close Skerries Secondary Department, and Scottish Ministers had not called in this decision. The

closure would take place at the end of this term, and transition arrangements had commenced for the pupils.

- Changes were being made at all schools as to how S3 was being delivered. These would take effect from the next academic year and would ensure that the Broad General Education phase was being delivered appropriately. The Senior phase was becoming embedded in schools and there were a couple of years to work towards this. Current S3-S4 pupils would not be disadvantaged.
- The report proposed in the recommendation from the Education and Families Committee would include information relating to closure options and staffing implications.
- The Council's statements in its Corporate Plan related to various areas, and did not refer solely to education. However further information could be supplied to Members as to how the Council intended to achieve the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan.

Ms Wishart, Chair of the Education and Families Committee advised that the Education and Families Committee had rejected the recommendations in the report. The Committee had taken into account the view of Education Scotland that neither the current arrangement of providing education for S1-S4 stages nor the discontinuing of S3-S4 stages were viable options, and had unanimously recommended that the Director of Children's Services be asked to reconsider the way ahead within the Strategy for Education in Shetland and come forward with a proposal for consultation on Secondary 1 to Secondary 3 and closure for each of the Junior High Schools - Sandwick, Aith, Mid Yell, Baltasound and Whalsay - and to bring back a report to the Committee and Council before the recess which includes a revised timetable.

She therefore moved that the Council resolved to accept this recommendation from the Education and Families Committee, adding that this revised timetable would not alter the transition times for young people, and that it had been recommended that these should not be taking place until the new AHS had been built.

Mr Cleaver seconded.

Members commented that they felt that this was a sensible way to proceed, particularly given the comments from Education Scotland regarding the current model of provision and the requirements of the CfE. Concern was expressed regarding the considerable pressure that may be put on staff to complete this report in a short timescale, and the Chair of the Education and Families Committee advised that she had been assured by the Director of Children's Services it would be possible to prepare the report in this timescale.

Decision:

The Education and Families Committee **RECOMMENDED** that Shetland Islands Council resolve that the Director of Children's Services be asked to reconsider the way ahead within the Strategy for Education in Shetland and come forward with a proposal for consultation on Secondary 1 to Secondary 3 and closure for each of the Junior High Schools - Sandwick, Aith, Mid Yell, Baltasound and Whalsay - and to bring back a report to the Committee and Council before the recess which includes a revised timetable.

The meeting closed at 2.45pm.

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Convener