



MINUTES

A&B - Public

Special Education and Families Committee
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lerwick
Tuesday 1 July 2014 at 10.00am

Present:

Councillors:

G Cleaver	B Fox
A Manson	G Robinson
D Sandison	G Smith
M Stout	V Wishart

Religious Representatives:

T Macintyre	R MacKay
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Also:

S Coutts	T Smith
A Wishart	

Apologies:

P Campbell	F Robertson
M Tregonning	

In Attendance:

M Boden, Chief Executive
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
C Anderson, Senior Communications Officer
K Johnston, Solicitor
S Laurenson, Consultant Adviser
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

None

19/14 **Application for Financial Assistance – Open Peer Education Project**

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services (Report No: CS-13-14-F) which presented a request for grant assistance from Voluntary Action Shetland for its Open Peer Education Project.

The Director of Children's Services summarised the main terms of the report, advising that it was being proposed that surplus funds from another project previously repaid to the Council be used to fund the shortfall. If the recommendation was approved, the Robertson Trust would provide matched funding. In response to a query, she said that she understood there had been no arrangements made with Shetland Charitable Trust to provide further funding.

On the motion of Reverend Macintyre, seconded by Mr G Smith, the Committee approved the recommendation in the report.

Decision:

The Education and Families Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- Award a grant of up to £12,000 to Voluntary Action Shetland to assist with the costs of delivering its Peer Education service during financial year 2014/15
- Award a one-off grant of up to £12,000 to Voluntary Action Shetland, which will comply with the principles of the 'Following the Public Pound Code' and be subject to the standard Council grant conditions for voluntary organisations and any additional conditions that may be required.

20/14

Children's Services Directorate – Savings made to date and further savings required under the Medium-Term Financial Plan

The Committee noted a report by the Executive Manager - Finance (Report No: F-032-F3) that set out the progress that the Children's Services Directorate had made with savings to date, and detailed the progress towards delivering the savings that have been agreed as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

The Executive Manager – Finance summarised the main terms of the report, highlighting that savings of £3.756million had been achieved to date, and that a further £4.673million savings would be required to be identified up to 2020. He pointed out that these savings were required across the Children's Services Directorate, not just the Schools Service.

Decision:

The Education and Families Committee **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report.

21/14

Secondary Education Cost per Pupil in Shetland

The Committee considered a joint report by the Chief Executive and the Executive Manager – Finance (Report No: F-031-F) which established why Shetland's Secondary Cost per Pupil (SCPP) figures published by the Scottish Government were higher than the other island authorities.

The Chief Executive introduced the report that had been prepared at the request of the Committee, and thanked all those involved in its preparation. He advised that the information contained up to paragraph 2.52 of the appendix could be used with a degree of confidence for benchmarking purposes with Orkney and the Western Isles, and for making decisions as to whether or not to go ahead with best value exercises. Orkney and the Western Isles had been chosen for geographical

reasons, but other areas could also have been used for comparators. The figures included up to paragraph 2.52 had been prepared for the Scottish Local Finance Return and should be read in that context – they could not be translated directly into budget figures, such as those included in the earlier report on the agenda. The figures provided a financial perspective only, and there were other aspects that would need to be taken into account before any final decisions could be made. The current situation had resulted from decisions made earlier by the Council, and there was also a need to explore the reasons behind these decisions before making any changes. If Members wished to explore any areas further, this would require a best value study.

He went on to say that the figures in the report included comparisons with Orkney and the Western Isles from the level of a local education authority right down to the level of individual schools, so it was a much more detailed comparison than anything that had been considered before. Orkney and the Western Isles had both reduced their costs significantly over the past three years. The figures in the report illustrated that Shetland provided the most expensive secondary education in Scotland, and suggested that there were a number of key drivers for this. One of the key drivers was the number of secondary schools. Shetland had seven secondary schools whereas the other two local authorities had five. If the same teacher/pupil ratios were applied, Shetland would have three secondary schools. The figures relating to the number of teachers in each school were also interesting, as were the figures relating to the numbers of non-teaching staff. If the size of the school was taken into account, Baltasound and Brae would stand out for further consideration. Numbers of teachers and support staff were also driven by the number of schools. In terms of attainment, Shetland performed very well at standard grade level, but this was not so marked at higher level. Attainment figures in relation to the spend on education were very interesting, as was the variation in performance across Shetland.

He pointed out that the figures beyond paragraph 2.52 of the appendix were gross budget figures, so they had been prepared on a different basis. These figures illustrated the progress that had been made. It was important to note that the figures for other local authorities would also have moved on from 2012/13, and that all figures would be affected by changes in pupil numbers. There had been a reduction in FTE teaching staff locally, but the figures for the AHS and Baltasound were in inverse proportion to where a benchmarking exercise would have led.

The Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and Executive Manager - Finance then responded to questions, and Members noted the following:

- The figures in paragraph 2.5.1 of the appendix illustrated that Shetland had managed to reduce its SCPP to a figure that was much closer to that of Orkney and the Western Isles. This table was based on 2012/13 figures and was a comparison at that point. Decisions made by the Committee and Council had reduced the costs to this level, and it was for Members to reflect as to whether they had made the most appropriate choices in order to reduce costs.
- Management costs in schools were something that was considered in terms of making efficiency savings. This was undertaken in a planned way, with consideration given to whether it would be possible to continue to provide a service to pupils if there was a reduction in staffing. The number of principal teachers had been reduced, and further opportunities would be taken to

reduce this number again during 2014/15. An agreement was in place with the Local Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff regarding management structures in schools, and the Council had not gone beyond the level agreed. There were no plans at the moment to look at shared management in secondary schools because the Strategy for Secondary Education was ongoing. A review regarding the reduction of clerical support in schools had just been completed. However it would only be possible to make so many efficiencies in management and clerical support before affecting the operation of the schools.

- There were some suggestions in the report as to areas that were worthy of further exploration, but it should be noted that these had been suggested purely on a financial basis and did not take account of any other impacts. Some of the figures quoted in the report would also require further exploration to find out reasons behind them, for example the differences in teacher/pupils ratios between Baltasound and Stronsay and Stromness and Brae.
- It was possible that teacher/pupil ratios were higher in Shetland due to historical reasons. When Junior High Schools had been set up, a FTE teacher had been allocated for each subject area in order to ensure that everyone had access to the full curriculum, and also for socio-economic reasons. Work had taken place to reduce staff and to use them more efficiently to continue to deliver the range of subjects offered. It was probable that teacher/pupil ratios were lower in other areas because the range of subjects offered was less.
- The job sizing toolkit for promoted posts looked at the various aspects of management and duties that each postholder was required to carry out, and the postholders were awarded points based on a national system.
- Property costs were higher because there were more schools. Costs had reduced significantly, but there was a fine balance between maintaining schools in a good condition and reducing maintenance in the likelihood that this would result in more repairs being required in future.
- The figures quoted in the report for 2012/13 would have moved on for all local authorities, so genuine comparisons could not be made beyond this date.
- Pension costs locally sat within the Schools Service budget. The added years element locally also sat within the area that the cost had originally arisen from. It was likely that pension costs were higher than other local authorities as the Council had previously allowed ten added years, although this was no longer the case. There was some discretion as to where pension costs could be allocated, and this was something that could be looked at. However Audit Scotland had stated that it would be following accounting principles and best practice to allocate the cost of early retirement packages to the services which they had arisen from. In that way, the service had to bear the cost if they agreed to give someone an added years package.
- The Council received £19million in Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) for education, and spent in the region of £31/32million. An element of GAE was received to cover hostel boarding costs, but it was unlikely that this covered the actual costs relating to the hostel. Further information could be sought

and supplied to Members. A supplement was also received for small schools, and any school closure proposals always detailed any reduction in GAE that would arise as a result. However the actual reduction in GAE tended to be immaterial when considered in the wider context.

- Whilst the Council could make the case to the Government that it should be receiving more money to cover hostel costs as other areas did not have this additional pressure, it was unlikely to be successful. Other authorities could make a case for additional funding based on deprivation, and this was a big factor in political decision-making. GAE funding was based on a national formula and even if the Government agreed to open up the formula for debate, it was possible that Shetland would then end up worse off in other areas.
- The Council spent significantly more on education, but its attainment results were not proportionally higher. This was an area that may be worthy of further consideration.
- Cost comparisons between individual schools in Shetland and individual schools in other local authorities - such as a detailed comparison between Baltasound and Stronsay - were not available, as that level of detail had not been received from the other local authorities.

The Chair thanked officers for preparing the report

During the discussion that followed, Members commended officers for producing the report, and for the work that had been done to reduce secondary education costs in Shetland.

A Member commented that from the information presented, he found it difficult to accept that the above average costs were as a result of the number of secondary schools in Shetland.

Members highlighted in particular the need for further exploration of teacher/pupil ratios and cost/attainment ratios locally. It was also suggested that it would be useful to examine promoted posts, to get further information on whether any other local authorities spend more than their GAE allocation on education, and that it would be interesting to get a more detailed comparison between Baltasound and Stronsay schools.

Members commented that rather than having a definitive list of potential efficiencies to be explored, it would be more appropriate to investigate any areas of potential efficiencies that may arise.

The Chief Executive confirmed that he would allow discretion for officers to look at any relevant areas, and he noted that two particular areas had been highlighted today with regard to teacher/pupil ratios and cost/attainment ratios. There would be resource implications in carrying out this work but, depending on the decision made on the later agenda item in relation to the Strategy for Secondary Education, it may be possible to carry out some of this work in parallel to any work required on the Strategy. It was noted that the Accounts Commission would also be carrying out some work in relation to its report on School Education, and that this should be monitored to ensure that there was no duplication of effort.

Decision:

The Education and Families Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- Note the content of Appendix 1 to the report – Annual Cost of Secondary Education per Pupil in Shetland; and
- Instruct the Chief Executive, or his nominee, to investigate areas of potential efficiencies and bring forward reports on how these might be achieved.

22/14

Strategy for Secondary Education in Shetland – Amendment

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services (CS-14-14-F), which presented an amendment to the Strategy for Secondary Education in Shetland.

The Director of Children's Services summarised the main term of the report, highlighting the consultation period and proposals for consultation. She advised that with regard to the order of the proposed consultations, there was a need to consider Mid Yell in the first tranche because of the potential implications with regard to Baltasound Junior High School and Burravoe Primary School. She pointed out that Education Scotland had provided a report in relation to the proposals for Sandwick Junior High School, considered by the Committee on 9 June, and had raised a number of relevant points. 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".

She went on to say that a number of things had changed since the beginning of the year in relation to secondary education. The first tranche of S4 pupils had now been through the N4 and N5 qualifications and the Curriculum for Education (CfE) in secondary education was bringing changes. 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 (SLP) project was now up and running and plans were well advanced to offer a wider range of opportunities for Senior Phase pupils, both vocational as well as academic.

She concluded by saying 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. The SLP was also 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. If there was a need for a transition point, it was important that pupils had an intact Senior Phase and no disruption to their Broad General Education. At the Committee's meeting on 9 June, she had been asked to bring forward a report before the recess reconsidering the way ahead within the Strategy for Education in Shetland, and to 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, including a revised timetable, so this was what was being presented today.

Responding to questions, the Director of Children's Services confirmed that the courses currently being considered as part of the SLP project would attract external funding, but there would have to be further discussion with regard to funding as there was not a large budget to assist. Skills Development Scotland was very interested in the project, which involved the local authority working closely with the two colleges locally. BP had also expressed an interest in the provision of training to assist with the oil and gas works going on locally at the moment, as young people were having to leave Shetland to take advantage of these training opportunities and the courses were over-subscribed.

She also confirmed that if the recommendations were approved by the Committee and the Council, work would take place between now and the first statutory consultation to develop the S1-S3 model. So there would be more information available regarding things like subject availability, and people would have a fuller understanding of the proposed model when the statutory consultation process commenced.

The Chair thanked officers for preparing the report in such a short time

Mr Cleaver moved that the Committee agree the recommendations in the report, and Ms Wishart seconded.

Decision:

The Education and Families Committee **RECOMMENDED** that the Council resolve to approve the following recommendations as outlined in the amended Strategy for Secondary Education.

In approving the amended Strategy, statutory consultations will be carried out on secondary education provision in Shetland as set out below. The Council delegates the implementation of these resolutions to the Director of Children's Services.

Actions:

- a) Children's Services progresses statutory consultation on the options of the proposed closure of Mid Yell Junior High School Secondary Department, or the discontinuation of Secondary 4 provision only; statutory consultation on this proposal with its two options would commence in September 2014 with a proposed transfer date for pupils of August 2016 to the new Anderson High School, or as soon as possible thereafter;
- b) Children's Services progresses statutory consultation on the options of the proposed closure of Whalsay School Secondary Department, or the discontinuation of Secondary 4 provision only; statutory consultation on this proposal with its two options would commence in September 2014 with a proposed transfer date for pupils of August 2016 to the new Anderson High School, or as soon as possible thereafter;
- c) Children's Services progresses statutory consultation on the options of the proposed closure of Baltasound Junior High School Secondary Department or the discontinuation of Secondary 4 provision only; statutory consultation on this proposal with its two options would commence in August 2015 with a proposed transfer date for pupils of August 2016 to the new Anderson High School or as soon as possible thereafter;

- d) Children's Services progresses statutory consultation on the options of the proposed closure of Aith Junior High School Secondary Department or the discontinuation of Secondary 4 provision only; statutory consultation on this proposal with its two options would commence in October 2015 with a proposed transfer date for pupils of August 2016 to the new Anderson High School or as soon as possible thereafter;
- e) Children's Services progresses statutory consultation on the options of the proposed closure of Sandwich Junior High School Secondary Department or the discontinuation of Secondary 4 provision only; statutory consultation on this proposal with its two options would commence in October 2015 with a proposed transfer date for pupils of August 2016 to the new Anderson High School or as soon as possible thereafter.

The meeting concluded at 11.20am

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Chair