

MINUTE

‘A’ & ‘B’

Special Services Committee
Room 16, Islesburgh Community Centre, Lerwick
Monday 28 January 2002 at 10.30 am

Present:

P Malcolmson	R I Black
M U Colligan	F B Grains
I J Hawkins	J C Irvine
J P Nicolson	J M Ritch
F A Robertson	T W Stove
W N Stove	W Tait

Apologies:

R J Anderson	Dr C M Begg
A J Cluness	W H Manson

Captain G G Mitchell

In Attendance (Officers):

J Watt, Executive Director – Community Services
M Payton, Head of Education Services
H Sutherland, Section Leader – Corporate Policy
H Budge, Senior Education Officer
E Smaaskjaer, Administration Manager, Community Services
C Brown, Education Adviser (General Primary)
S Gray, Education Adviser (Pre-School/Early Years)
A Irvine, Assistant Adviser (Secondary)
L Roberts, Education Adviser (SEN)
R Sim, Assistant Adviser (Secondary)
J Wadley, Assistant Adviser (Primary)
L Geddes, Committee Officer

Also:

O Aitken, Consultant
J Reyner, Head Teacher

Chairman:

Mr P Malcolmson, Chairman of the Committee, presided.

Circular:

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

01/02 **Inspection of the Education Function of Shetland Islands Council**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Education Services (Appendix 1), who gave a presentation to the Committee (copy of slides attached as Appendix 1a & 1b). Copies of the

'Action Plan – Draft Executive Summary' were also handed out to Members (copy attached as Appendix 1c).

It was noted that, due to the timescales involved, the Action Plan would be published with the proviso that Shetland Islands Council will fully endorse it at its next meeting.

In response to questions on the slides, Members commented that an improvement in the flow of information was required in order to help them carry out their jobs more effectively.

The Chairman said that he was hopeful that this process would now start moving, and that it was important to have Members and officers working closely together. He added that these issues would remain a standing item on each Services Committee agenda until feedback was received from HM Inspectors in a year's time.

A Member referred to the important role of Head Teachers in particular, and also stakeholders. He emphasised the need for a multi-agency approach and expressed disappointment that Head Teachers were not present at the meeting today, which would have given him some comfort that this was beginning to happen.

The Head of Education Services confirmed that there were close links with a number of other agencies, including Social Care Services and NHS Shetland. Part of the process would be to look at these links and make sure that they were strengthened where necessary. He added that the Education Service had always had good communication and co-operation with Head Teachers, and that schools have always had a degree of autonomy.

In response to a query regarding the inclusion of Head Teachers in the 'Consultation to Date' in Appendix 1b, the Head of Education Services confirmed that Head Teachers had been consulted. The Chairman added that he would ensure Head Teachers were included, and advised that they were very much involved with all key strategy working groups.

A Member enquired how School Board clusters would be seen to be evolving, pointing out that he felt any overlaps would have to be carefully considered. He added that many of the children in his constituency end up attending school in Lerwick, which could present problems for elected Members and smaller School Boards.

The Head of Education Services advised that this had not yet been thought out in great detail, but that it was likely to follow normal geographical locations such as associated primary and secondary schools, or a North Isles cluster.

Services Committee
28 January 2002 Public Minutes

In commenting that Shetland had some of the best schools in the country and that teachers in Shetland were as well trained as others, a Member questioned how Shetland had managed to get into the problematic situation that it was now in.

The Chairman pointed out that there were strengths in the Education Service, but that the HMI report had highlighted some relevant weak spots which had to be addressed. He added that it was the first time this authority had been inspected in this way.

A Member pointed out that Members used to receive annual reports, listing information for all schools, and that this made it easier to follow trends. She said that she would find it useful if this statistical information was again circulated.

The Head of Education Services said that data analysis had been one of the key recommendations and that a clearer system of reporting, including financial data, would be developed.

In concluding, the Chairman said that it would be important to continue with Member/Officer working groups. Implementation of the Action Plan would become a standing item on the Services Committee agenda, which would take into account Question 1 in Appendix 1a. A Member pointed out that it would also be useful to present this to the Education Forum in first instance.

In relation to Question 2 of Appendix 1a, the Chairman felt that the role of the Education Forum should be emphasised and utilised better, as debate in Forum can help to inform the Services Committee.

The Chairman also emphasised the need ensure that monitoring of the Plan, referred to in Question 3 of Appendix 1a, was carried out on an ongoing basis. The Plan would be presented to Committee, where it could be monitored.

Mr P Malcolmson moved that the recommendations be amended to read:

"I recommend that the Services Committee approves the draft Executive Summary for the purposes of publication and recommends to Shetland Islands Council that:

- 5.1 the decision of the Services Committee to publish the Action Plan as Shetland Islands Council's response to the recommendations in the HMI report is endorsed by Shetland Islands Council
- 5.2 implementation of the plan be monitored both within the Education Service and through a monitoring group which

included the Executive Director – Community Services and members of the Best Value team.”

Mr J P Nicolson seconded and the Committee agreed.

02/02 **Draft Policy for Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Education Services (Appendix 2), and the Senior Education Officer gave a presentation to the Committee (copies of slides attached as Appendix 2a).

The Senior Education Officer pointed out that the draft policy had been presented to the last Services Committee for noting. In response to a query, she said that timescales were very tight but it was hoped to have the policy operational very soon. There would be an update report presented to the next Services Committee meeting, and a final copy would probably be presented in the following cycle of meetings. It was intended to be a ‘living’ document which would be reviewed periodically.

A Member referred to page 19 of the Appendix, and said that the felt that School Boards were integral to this function. He enquired if School Boards were seen to be of importance.

The Senior Education Officer confirmed that School Boards were considered very important, and meetings had already taken place with them. There would also be training available for School Board Members in relation to devolved school management. School Boards had also requested representation on the Consultation and Communication Working Group, and this would be taken onboard. The Chairman added that he would ensure that this was reflected in the document.

(Mr T W Stove left the meeting)

A Member advised that he had served on School Boards since their inception. One of his concerns was consistency which he felt was necessary to ensure that pupils, moving in from primary and Junior High Schools, come in on an equal footing to others who have not had to make this move. Pupils had to deal with both a social and an educational change at this point which, he felt, may disadvantage some pupils.

On the motion of Mr J P Nicolson, seconded by Mr J M Ritch, the Committee approved the recommendations contained in the report.

03/02 **Best Value Service Review – Education Service**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Education Services (Appendix 3).

The Head of Education Services summarised the main terms of his report, highlighting some of the emerging issues and possible solutions for consideration.

A Member referred to a meeting of Head Teachers that had taken place the previous week, and enquired what their views were on the shared headship model.

The Head of Education Services confirmed that the recommendation in this report was for wider consultation on the shared headship model, and that this was not up for discussion at the Head Teachers' meeting at this stage. However, he confirmed that they would play a big part in the consultation process.

A Member commented that she was surprised to see the Council moving in this direction so quickly, particularly as only one place had carried out a pilot project on this. She stressed that it would be important to give a lot of thought before the closure of small schools, for example, was considered. A Member further commented that this had not yet been discussed, but he felt that there was a degree of 'scaremongering' going on. Another Member stressed that it was important to have an open debate about anything in this context, including school closures, as the Council may otherwise stand accused of having a hidden agenda.

The Executive Director pointed out that the shared headship model was not just isolated to one local authority in Scotland. It had been launched in England and other local authorities were also considering this.

A Member referred to Primary School Rationalisation in Appendix 3 of the report, and said that he felt that the closure of small primary schools should be considered when it was deemed to be of educational benefit only. Therefore he utterly rejected all the other bullet points in relation to this.

The changing role of Head Teachers, and the demands of new legislation was discussed. A Member spoke of the opportunity that may arise in getting skills to match the task, e.g. the opportunity for teachers to utilise managerial skills outwith the classroom. A Member pointed out that, with the shared headship model, it would be possible to develop expertise which could feed across 4-5 schools. This would allow teachers to get on with the job of educating children, rather than working on new legislation. The Executive Director advised that the changing role of Head Teachers would be built into Best Value Review.

A Member referred to the increase in demand in Lerwick, discussed in paragraph 4.4, and said that this was an issue which

Services Committee
28 January 2002 Public Minutes

could cut across the whole scope of Council provision. He felt that the wider demographics should also be discussed in the context of planning and development, and that there may no be an educational solution to this problem. The Chairman added that Members would have an opportunity to consider this soon when the Local Plan is presented for discussion.

Mr J P Nicolson moved, Mr J M Ritch seconded, and the Committee approved the recommendation contained in the report.

CHAIRMAN