



MINUTES

AB - Public

Education and Families Committee

Auditorium, Shetland Museum and Archives, Hay's Dock, Lerwick

Monday 5 December 2016 at 10.00am

Present:

Councillors:

A Manson	T Macintyre
F Robertson	G Robinson
D Sandison	G Smith
M Stout	M Tregonning
V Wishart	

Also:

T Smith

Apologies:

P Campbell	G Cleaver
B Fox	R Mackay

In Attendance:

J Belford, Executive Manager - Finance
H Budge, Director – Children's Services
S Thompson, Executive Manager - Schools
J Best, Solicitor
B Kerr, Communications Officer
J Macleod, Performance and Improvement Adviser
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

42/16

Children's Services Performance Report: Six Month/2nd Quarter 2016/17

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services (CS-33-16-F) which summarised the activity and performance of the Children's Services Directorate for the second quarter of 2016/17.

The Director of Children's Services summarised the main terms of the report, advising that she was very pleased with progress on some large areas of work. She confirmed that a site visit to the new Anderson High School for members of the Committee had been organised. As a number of apologies had been received, it was hoped to arrange a second site visit on 19 December for those who were unable to attend the first.

She went on to say that an interim report on the Delivery Plan had to be submitted to the Scottish Government by the end of the year, and the lead officers were currently working on its preparation. A bid for funding in respect of 'Developing the Young Workforce' had been prepared, and was being presented in Edinburgh on 6 December. It had not been possible to get the blueprint for early years on the agenda for this meeting, and this would be discussed further with the Chair and Vice Chair. The Committee may wish to have some input and this could be done via e-mail. A business case was currently being developed to build capacity in residential and foster care resources, and it was likely that a special meeting would be held in January to discuss this.

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

- The fact that the Schools Reconfiguration Project had now finished had made a big difference to the Service's ability to meet performance targets on time. Total overtime figures were not showing a corresponding reduction now that the Project had finished, but it was the case that the areas that were now seeing an increase in overtime were children and families social work and residential care, not the directorate.
- The targets in relation to sickness absence would be revised now that the maximising attendance policy had been in operation for a period of time.
- The final decision as to the number of subjects to be studied in S4 had yet to be made. There was a board and team looking at this using the Prince 2 methodology, and this included stakeholder groups with parent council representatives. It was felt that some more time was required to get a better understanding, but a decision would be made in December.

Decision:

The Education and Families discussed the contents of the report and made relevant comments on progress against priorities to inform further activity within the remainder of this year, and the planning process for next and future years.

43/16

Management Accounts for Education and Families Committee: 2016/17 - Projected Outturn at Quarter 2

The Committee considered a report by the Executive Manager – Finance (F-073-16-F) which enabled monitoring of the financial performance of services within its remit to ensure that Members are aware of the forecast income and expenditure, and the impact that this will have with regard to delivering the approved budget.

The Executive Manager – Finance summarised the main terms of the report, advising that it was a positive forecast. There were some minor variances, and he highlighted in particular the increased demand in Children's Residential services which would be met with contingency money from the central budget.

The Executive Manager – Finance and the Director – Children’s Services then responded to questions, and the Committee noted the following:

- The increased demand within Children’s Residential Services related to the costs of supporting looked-after children, but there was not a corresponding decrease in the cost of off-island placements. Additional space had been required for looked-after children, and the costs may have been more if these young people had had to go off-island. A strategy was currently being prepared to look at residential resources into the future, and it was likely that there would be a special meeting in January to consider this.
- Some of the costs that required to be met from the contingency budget were as predicted, however some of the others - in particular the holiday pay relating to overtime and additional hours - were new ones that would apply over this financial year. Provision had been made for them this year.
- Recurring savings in Quality Improvement and Schools had been identified through staffing reductions and operational efficiencies. When posts became vacant, consideration was always given to sharing staff, particularly in secondary schools. Staffing ratios in primary schools were very tight, but consideration was given to reducing staff when school rolls fell. This was something that was looked at on an annual basis, rather than being changed during the year unless necessary. The operational efficiencies being considered were reductions in operating costs, particularly school meals.
- The budget for capital and general maintenance works for schools was held within infrastructure services, rather than individually within each area.

Decision:

The Education and Families Committee reviewed the Management Accounts showing the projected outturn position at Quarter 2.

44/16

Education and Families Committee Business Programme 2016-17

The Committee considered a report by Team Leader – Administration (GL-50-16-F) which informed of the planned business to be presented to the Committee for the remaining quarters of the financial year.

It was noted that the allocations policy for the Halls of Residence would not be considered at the next meeting.

Decision:

The Education and Families Committee noted its planned business to be presented for the remaining quarters of the financial year (1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017) and **RESOLVED** to approve changes to the Business Programme.

45/16

Empowering Teachers, Parents and Communities to Achieve Excellence and Equity in Education - A Governance Review. Response from Education and Families Committee

The Committee considered a report by Director of Children’s Services (CS-35-16-F) which presented the Committee’s draft response to the Scottish Government consultation “Empowering Teachers, Parents and Communities to Achieve Excellence and Equity in Education – A Governance Review”.

The Director of Children's Services summarised the main terms of the report, advising that the Governance Review was one aspect of the Scottish Government's delivery plan for education and a response had to be submitted by January. Head teachers and parent councils were being encouraged to submit their own responses, and Young Scot had visited Shetland to carry out sessions with children in most junior high schools. A response was being submitted from that event, and a further event would take place later. Some of those completing the response had found the wording quite difficult to interpret, and a useful session had been held with parent council representatives to go over the questions. The Council had had the opportunity to put forward its views during ministerial input into the process the previous week. The response to be considered today was one which would be submitted on behalf of the Council, and members of the Committee could add further comments before it was submitted.

(Mr Stout joined the meeting during the following discussion)

During the discussion that followed, the following points were raised:

- It was acknowledged that it was difficult for officers to make political statements in the response, but it was strongly felt that the Council should use the opportunity to strengthen its position by submitting a more politically-influenced response which took account of the particular circumstances relating to Shetland, which were very different to those of the central belt. Consideration had to be given to the position of Shetland as an island authority, and the need for 'island-proofing' had to be emphasised.
- A much stronger case should be made that national policies were made and applied without taking local circumstances into account. A good example of this was that having to maintain the national agreement regarding teacher numbers meant that local resources could not be targeted where they should be. The Scottish Government's presumption against school closures also led the Council to have more schools than it otherwise might have, at the same time that there was less money available to deliver education locally. The Council was currently subsidising the delivery of education in the region of £10-14million per year, and this point would require to be made.
- The Council's response should not be constrained by the questions that were asked, and additional statements could be made to reflect local circumstances. Some bodies had submitted a statement instead of answering the questions in the document.
- The Scottish Government should be told that it was their top-down centralising approach that gave the Council most difficulty, and that the Council required more flexibility in areas such as the school estate, teacher numbers, and the curriculum. It was clear that the Scottish Government wanted to review the function of local authorities and their responsibilities, but education should not be singled out from the wider system. Surprise was expressed that the proposals had come from a left-wing administration, as it was felt that they were something that would be expected from a right-wing administration.
- There were concerns regarding the implications of some of the proposals relating to devolving authority to school level. It was felt that one of the benefits of the way education was structured in Scotland was that the job of teachers and head

teachers was to teach and ensure the quality of teaching, rather than having to act as administrators. Whilst it may seem to parents that there would be benefits in handing control to schools, it had to be borne in mind that with this control came the burden of responsibility and administration. It was very unlikely that this control would come with any additional money, so it would not be possible to reverse cuts in spending to transform the education system. Any suggestion that administration should be devolved to schools should therefore be refuted, and teachers and head teachers should remain free to teach rather than having to run schools as a business.

- The desire to create regional boards was something that could also create problems locally, and there was a danger that regional boards could end up acting as substitute local authorities. The Council was unlikely to have the same influence at regional level as to how best to meet educational needs, and could end up being 'squeezed' if plans to create regional boards went ahead. The Council, along with several other local authorities, was currently part of the Northern Alliance. This was a good model but it did not deal with control of policy and budgets, so it did not act in the same capacity.

It was suggested that the final version of the response should be politically based, and that preparation of it should be delegated to the Chair and Director of Children's Services, taking account of the points raised at the meeting and any points members of the Committee may wish to submit following the meeting.

The Committee agreed, requesting that the final response be issued to members of the Committee.

Decision:

The Education and Families Committee considered the response prepared on its behalf in respect of "Empowering Teachers, Parents and Communities to Achieve Excellence and Equity in Education – A Governance Review". The Committee agreed that the Chair and the Director should prepare the final response for submission, taking account of the comments that had been made at the meeting, and any further comments that members of the Committee wished to submit following the meeting.

46/16

Shetland's Autism Spectrum Disorder Strategy 2016-21 and Action Plan - Progress

The Committee considered a report by Executive Manager – Adult Services (CC-87-16-F) which provided an overview of key activities of the Shetland's Autism Spectrum Disorder Strategy Working Group to date following final approval of the Shetland's Autism Spectrum Disorder Strategy 2016-21.

The Director of Children's Services summarised the main terms of the report, advising that the Committee were being asked to note the progress that had been made in the action plan.

Members of the Committee commented that they felt that the Strategy was very good, and they were pleased to see that progress was being made with the points in the action plan.

Decision:

The Education and Families Committee noted the progress made by the Shetland's Autism Spectrum Disorder Strategy Working Group in taking Shetland's Autism Spectrum Disorder Strategy 2016-2021 Action Plan forward.

The meeting concluded at 10.50am.

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Chair