



MINUTES

A&B - Public

**Education and Families Committee
Room 10, Islesburgh Community Centre, Lerwick
Monday 6 March 2017 at 10.00am**

Present:

Councillors:

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

Also:

T Smith

Religious Representatives:

M Tregonning

Apologies:

T Macintyre

In Attendance:

H Budge, Director – Children's Services
C Bain, Treasury Accountant
K Johnston, Solicitor
J Macleod, Performance and Improvement Adviser
M Thomson, 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

Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2017 on the motion of Mr Robertson, seconded by Mr G Smith.

The Committee considered a report by the Director – Children's Services (CS-07-17-F) which summarised the activity and performance of the Children's Services Directorate for the third quarter of 2016/17.

The Director of Children's Services summarised the main terms of the report, advising that the new Anderson High School and Halls of Residence project was on budget and on time. The Northern Alliance continued to work on an Islands' Plan, and the consultation responses to the Governance Review consultation with regard to 'Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education' were currently being analysed. The Council had submitted a response, as had some parent councils and a school locally. A funding bid had been presented in respect of Developing Young Workforce, and this had been well received. A successful bid had been submitted in respect of Early Learning and Childcare and, as a result, a trial would be commencing at Urafirth Primary School in April. A business case was currently being developed for residential and foster care services, and planning permission had been approved for a new children's home in Tingwall. Funding had been received as part of the national framework for Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education, but only two-thirds of schools locally had received this due to the funding methodology, which was based on free school meals. Of those schools that did receive funding, eight had received £1,200.

The Chair added that COSLA had spoken about the Governance Review consultation and changes that may arise as a result. It appeared that the Scottish Government's policy had moved away from one of regional boards towards developing a regional collaboration model, so representations that had been made were having some effect. She went on to say that representations were being made to the Scottish Government that a better methodology should have been applied in respect of funding that had been granted in respect of closing the attainment gap.

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

- The regional collaboration model that was being mooted was similar to what was already being done in the Northern Alliance. The Depute First Minister had endorsed the Northern Alliance model at a recent conference, and spoken about developing it across Scotland.
- There was a view, highlighted at a national level, that the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) was well developed, particular for the early stages, but that it had caused the curriculum to become cluttered or diluted. A recent benchmarking exercise had been carried out, and a new suite of documents issued. Teachers had worked very hard to ensure everything was being taken on board, but it was becoming something that would need to be kept under review.
- The number of new fee paid foster carers recruited was a new indicator that was being included as there was a need to encourage more people to become foster carers. There had been difficulties in recruiting in the past, although there had been some recent interest expressed.
- Online learning and remote teaching would be included in the Children's Services Directorate Improvement Plan. There were four main areas to this plan,

and the development of e-learning would be included in relation to the closing of the attainment gap.

The team involved with the new Anderson High School project were congratulated for their efforts in ensuring that the project was on budget and on target for being completed within the 44-week contract.

It was noted that despite the reduction in resources, the report illustrated that the Council was still managing to deliver a broad range of good outcomes, and that this was commendable given the funding issues. Representations had been made to the Cabinet Secretary regarding the reality of distributing funding directly to schools in respect of closing the attainment gap, outlining the fact that half the schools in Shetland had received little or no funding. The Cabinet Secretary had said he was open to suggestions regarding the formula used for the distribution of funding for the Pupil Equity Fund, and the Council would be responding on this. However the new Council would require to engage with the Scottish Government regarding the issues experienced in delivering services in island areas.

Decision:

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

10/17 Management Accounts for Education and Families Committee: 2016/17 – Projected Outturn at Quarter 3

The Committee considered a report by the Executive Manager - Finance (F-025-F) which monitored the financial performance of services within its remit to ensure that members were aware of the forecasted income and expenditure and the impact that this will have with regard to delivering the approved budget.

The Management Accountant summarised the main terms of the report, highlighting that the projected revenue outturn position was an underspend of £239,000. The projected capital outturn position was an underspend of £3,963,000. There was a requirement for slippage of £3,969,000 relating to the new Anderson High School project, which resulted in an overall overspend position of £6,000.

Responding to questions, the Director of Children's Services explained that the budget for sickness cover would always look as if it was being overspent due to the way it had been established and was accounted for. However sickness levels had reduced over the last year.

It was commented that it was good to see that recurring savings had been achieved, particularly in terms of the challenges that had been faced by the Committee. Officers were commended for their hard work in achieving this position.

Decision:

The Education and Families Committee reviewed the Management Accounts showing the projected outturn position at Quarter 3.

11/17 Zetland Educational Trust – Investment of Reserves

The Committee considered a report by Executive Manager - Finance (F-035-F) which reviewed the Zetland Educational Trust (ZET) investment options.

The Treasury Accountant summarised the main terms of the report, advising that investment income over the past few years had been limited to fixed bank deposit interest, and alternative investment could produce a higher income. The alternative options explored met the requirement of paying income to the Trust during the year in which it was earned, although only two complied with the main ZET criteria. Baillie Gifford's proposed Corporate Bond Fund was the preferred investment as returns were less volatile, with higher income and lower fees.

Members commented that they welcomed the report, which would enable greater benefits to be delivered than had been the case in the past.

In response to queries, the Treasury Accountant advised that the Baillie Gifford investment would produce income that would be paid to the ZET. The capital value of the investment would go up or down, but income would still be paid to the ZET as capital and income would be completely separate, and the income from bonds had to be paid over.

It was noted that further information would be supplied to the Committee following the meeting with regard to the Audit/Independent Examiner's fee referred to in Section 2.4 of the Appendix to the report.

Mr Campbell moved that the recommendations in the report be approved, and Mr Robinson seconded.

Decision:

The Education and Families Committee RECOMMENDED that the Policy and Resources Committee RESOLVE to approve the investment of the Zetland Educational Trust reserves with Baillie Gifford in their Corporate Bond Fund.

Chair's Closing Remarks

The Chair addressed the meeting as follows:

"This is the last Education and Families Committee of this Council and the last time I will be in the Chair, so I'd like to say a few words.

Firstly thank you to my Vice Chair and to all of our Committee members who have made such a positive contribution to the work of Children's Services over the last five years.

Children's Services has made some important steps forward in the last five years. Standards have remained high and in many areas have improved.

Developments in the learning partnership have provided our young people with the vocational qualification they need while still at school, thanks to a collaboration between the high school, colleges and employers. A particular thanks goes to Sandra Laurensen for her work in getting this success story off the ground, and it is now being held up as a model for other authorities.

The collaboration with Orkney and the Western Isles has grown stronger; sharing information between the three authorities has allowed projects to go ahead which would have been difficult to undertake separately, and the same applies to the Northern Alliance. Being able to collaborate on education policy and leadership, early literacy and tackling inequalities has enhanced the professional standards in our directorates.

We also had a number of consultations on the school estate. I was disappointed to discover during some of them that education was not the first priority for our young folk among parents and some communities, so educational arguments fell on stony ground. But I guess that is the social climate we are living in.

What about our young folk themselves? Despite having to shed more than £7million out of Children's Services in the last five years, attainment levels remain high. According to the latest Education Scotland briefing on Shetland, "this is still a high performing authority. Young people in Shetland continue to progress to positive destinations. Effective arrangements are in operation" and "Recent inspection evidence demonstrates effective delivery of Broad General Education in primary schools".

As far as literacy and numeracy are concerned, for the fifth year in succession performance at SCQF level 4 was much greater than the national comparator. So despite the money that has had to come out of our budget, standards remain high. But this cannot continue and the challenge for the next council will be how to keep our attainment levels high with an ever-reducing pot of money.

Other challenges for the next council include the delivery of extra early learning and childcare hours and increased provision for out looked after children. I'm sure none of us want to see children being sent away to the mainland and we are already exploring the idea of a new children's home in Tingwall.

I haven't forgotten about the new high school and hostel, which is currently on time and on budget and, if it remains that way, will be open in the autumn. This will offer pupils a modern learning environment and hopefully enhance their experience of school. I think the fact that it has got to this stage is down to the tenacity of our Director of Children's Services. At the beginning of this build there was a lot of scepticism, but that seems to have faded away.

Finally, I would like to say a very big thank you to the staff of Children's Services and all officials who have always taken a professional attitude to their work and at the same time helped me along the road and courteously and kindly answered some of my daft questions. Combined with dedicated teaching staff, the good work will continue.

I would like to say a particular thank you to the Director of Children's Services, Helen Budge. We have not always agreed, but have managed an open and honest relationship and she has led her teams through some very difficult times, but has remained stoical in the face of both professional and personal hardship. So thank you all, that's it from me."

Mr Tregonning expressed his thanks to the Chair and Vice Chair, saying he believed the Committee had functioned very well and fulfilled its role and duty, and that its smooth running was down to the Chair and Vice Chair.

The Committee concurred.

The meeting concluded at 10.35am.

