



Shetland Islands Council

MINUTE

A&B

**Special Services Committee
Main Hall, Town Hall, Lerwick
Thursday 24 June 2004**

Present:

F B Grains L Angus
B Cheyne A J Cluness
C B Eunson B P Gregson
L G Groat I J Hawkins
J Henry A Inkster
E Knight W H Manson
G G Mitchell J P Nicolson
F A Robertson J G Simpson
W N Stove W Tait

Apologies:

R G Feather J C Irvine
W A Ratter T W Stove

In Attendance:

M Goodlad, Chief Executive
A Jamieson, Head of Education Service
J Smith, Head of Organisational Development
H Budge, Senior Education Officer
H Tait, Management Accountant
A Cogle, Service Manager, Administration

Chairperson

Mrs F B Grains, Chairperson of the Committee, presided.

Circular

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

47/04 **Best Value Service Review – A Long Term Strategy for Education in Shetland**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Education (Appendix 1).

The Chairperson began by welcoming everyone to the meeting, particularly constituents who had come to see the proceedings. She reminded members of the public that only Members of the Committee were permitted to speak at the meeting, and Councillors would be given the opportunity to put forward their views to the Committee.

The Head of Education began by providing a PowerPoint presentation detailing the process carried out by the Member/Officer Working Group, and explained in detail the factors that were taken into account using the option appraisal system. A copy of the presentation slides are attached as Appendix 2. The Head of Education concluded by

Services Committee

24 June 2004 Public Minutes

outlining the proposals agreed by the Member/Officer Working Group. He drew Members' attention to the proposals in section 9 and the recommendations in section 10 of the report, and indicated that proposal 9.2.1 had now been moved to recommendation 10.2, recommending this matter for informal consultation, rather than to agree the proposal at this stage.

Mr W H Manson paid tribute to the work of the Education staff at Hayfield House who had been involved in the work of the Member/Officer Working Group, for the enormous amount of work they had contributed to the exercise, sometimes within very tight timescales.

Mr A J Cluness echoed the compliments paid to Education staff. He went on to say that there was nothing more important than the education of children and, in this regard, he said that people should have the opportunity to consider the proposals further. He said that people needed a reasonable period of time to be consulted on all aspects of the report, and moved that the Committee recommend to the Council that it:

- (a) accept recommendation 10.1;
- (b) delete recommendation 10.2 ("agree the proposals at 9.2.7, 9.2.8, 9.2.9 and 9.2.10);
- (c) reword recommendation 10.3 to read "...agree a further period of informal community consultation on **all** the proposals."; and
- (d) in relation to recommendation 10.4, that the Head of Education comes forward with a further report to Services Committee on 2 October 2004 relating to all the proposals in Section 9 of the report.

Mr W H Manson seconded.

Mr L Angus said that he would support Mr Cluness's motion, provided that a Member/Officer Working Group be established to consider specifically Primary provision in the Lerwick area, with a view to coming forward with recommendations, also by 2 October 2004. Mr A J Cluness, with the consent of his seconder, agreed to accept this within the motion, provided that the Head of Education was able to achieve such recommendations within that timescale.

Mr J P Nicolson said that elements of the proposals concerned him, and sought reassurance and commitment that an opportunity would be provided to make representations on these matters during the consultation period. He said that his particular concerns related to those proposals affecting Yell, and he was particularly annoyed at some of the inaccuracies within the report. Mr Nicolson said he was also very disappointed at the negativity in the report, and was surprised that there had been no mention of the very good HMIE reports received on some of the schools concerned.

Mr Nicolson went on to say that the critical point was the 30% weighting given to the quality of service, and in this regard it was important to

listen to the customers. He said that the information provided on the quality was gained from within the Council, and that customer satisfaction had not been regarded. Mr Nicolson said that the practical application of the option appraisal process was flawed, and moved as an amendment that the option appraisal process and weighting be re-assessed and reviewed.

Mrs F B Grains said that the option appraisal was the clinical approach agreed by the Council. She said that the effects of those conclusions and therefore the proposals in this report needed to be discussed further. Mrs Grains gave assurance to Mr Nicolson that the consultation process would allow those conclusions to be discussed further and debated. Mr Nicolson withdrew his amendment.

Mrs I J Hawkins moved that the Committee recommend to the Council that it accept the motion by Mr A J Cluness, but that in relation to proposal 9.2.1, that the Council agree now that the secondary departments in Scalloway and Sandwick will offer all levels of education for pupils from S1 to S6. Mr W Tait seconded.

Mrs Hawkins went on to express concern at the current vacancy for a Head Teacher at Scalloway, and that further delays to this appointment were not necessary. She said that the consultation already carried out in these areas showed clearly that Sandwick and Scalloway were ready to move to this provision now, and saw no benefit in further consultation on this aspect.

Mr J G Simpson gave notice of a further amendment in relation to proposal 9.2.1.

The Head of Education confirmed that the reason for awaiting the outcome of this report in relation to the Head Teacher post at Scalloway, was that the previous BV report to the Council in 2002 had resulted in a suggestion as to the possible closure of the secondary department at Scalloway. He said that if that proposal was clearly no longer on the table, then the recruitment process could begin immediately. The Head of Education added that the recruitment would be in relation to a Head Teacher as manager of the School, regardless of whether or not it included S4 to S6.

Mrs Hawkins indicated that she still wished to proceed with her amendment.

In response to a question, Mr W H Manson confirmed that given the new academic year would begin in August this year, any proposals adopted by the Council would not take effect until August 2005 at the earliest. He added that the consultation process would not delay any recruitment process in relation to Scalloway.

Mr J G Simpson referred to the situation relating to Whalsay School, pointing out that the school had received a very poor HMIE report 4

years ago. He said that whilst the school had made big improvements since then, it was very plain that until the school can provide a consistent standard of education, there was no way that parents could allow their children to be disadvantaged. Mr Simpson said that very many valid points had already been made today, but Whalsay parents had little confidence in the school being able to provide an acceptable standard of higher secondary education at this time. In this regard, Mr Simpson said that the option to attend the Anderson High School at this stage should not be removed.

Mrs F B Grains said that the concerns raised by Mr Simpson would be covered during the consultation process proposed by Mr Cluness's motion. Mrs Grains said she had hoped that individual schools would not be singled out from that process.

Mr A Inkster reminded Members that the Working Group had gone through a very rigorous appraisal procedure, and the outcome of that had not been as he had expected. He said it was not true to say that customers had not been consulted, as questionnaires had been completed by stakeholders and through the Your Voice questionnaire. He went on to support the amendment by Mrs Hawkins as he felt it was unnecessary to delay given the unequivocal support in the catchment area.

Mr J P Nicolson said that whilst stakeholders may have been consulted, their views had not been taken into account, and he questioned the leadership of the Working Group members and their understanding of what was being carried out.

Mr A Inkster said it was true to say that the Members had not led the review, but relied on the knowledge, advice and expertise of officers in reaching a decision on the proposals being presented today. Mr J Henry said that at every stage during the review things were presented and explained very clearly and all Members understood the process all the way through.

Mr L Angus gave notice of a further amendment.

Mr B P Gregson said that whilst he understood the concerns being raised regarding Scalloway and Sandwick, he said that some schools, for example Mid Yell, were not capable of being implemented because the building was not suitable. Mr Gregson also referred to the Uyeasound Primary School, and said he was also disappointed that the report had failed to take account, or even make any mention, of the excellent HMIE report the school received. He also referred to the confusion regarding the building of the new Anderson High School, and how this review would affect its progress. Mr Gregson concluded by saying that it was too important an issue to be discussed within this timescale, and that an extension to the consultation period was needed.

Mr W H Manson indicated that it had been clearly stated that the Best Value Review would impact on the Anderson High School project, and in this respect, the Design Team would not be appointed until October.

After summing up, voting took place by a show of hands, and the result was as follows:

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| Amendment (I J Hawkins) | 5 |
| Motion (A J Cluness) | 12 |

Mr J G Simpson moved as amendment, in relation to paragraph 9.2.1 only that the proposal be agreed, but that until the parents can be confident that their local school can deliver a level of education equal to the Anderson High School, the option to attend the Anderson High School should be retained.

Whilst Mr Cluness said that he could accept that, Mr Manson disagreed, saying that it was unnecessary given that the consultation process being proposed would address that issue and that the amendment proposed should be made after the consultation and when the final proposals are made. Mr Simpson agreed to withdraw his amendment relating to paragraph 9.2.1, provided that his request was minuted.

Capt G Mitchell referred to the need to ensure parental choice.

Mrs B Cheyne said that the cost of improvements at Olnafirth Primary School had been estimated at £680k, and she questioned whether this level of expenditure was needed, and that more investigation should be undertaken into the requirements for the school and the expense. With reference to paragraph 7.1.3 of the report, Mrs Cheyne asked whether the £11m savings would be achieved after the upgrading of the secondary schools, or not. The Head of Education confirmed that it was after the upgrading.

Mr A Inkster said that the quality of education in Shetland was paramount, and he believed that the process gone through so far was very thorough.

Mr C B Eunson said he did not understand why the Anderson High School Board had not been consulted at any stage in the process, and said that the whole thing should be deferred until complete consultation was held with everybody.

Mr J G Simpson referred to the proposal to close the secondary department of Skerries School, and said that this went against the argument of benefiting communities. He said that the questionnaires returned on this issue showed that people were 100% in favour of retaining the secondary department, and feelings could not be stronger. Mr Simpson said that the Skerries community was a hard-working and

enterprising community who had suffered various business community problems recently, and this proposal would be the final blow. He said that continuing secondary education at Skerries did not disadvantage the pupils, and he gave some personal examples of former pupils who had gone on to achieve good positions and careers outwith the island.

Mr J G Simpson moved as amendment in relation to paragraph 9.2.2 only, that this proposal be removed from the report altogether. Mr B P Gregson seconded.

After summing up, voting again took place by a show of hands, and the result was as follows:

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| Further Amendment (J G Simpson) | 4 |
| Motion (A J Cluness) | 12 |

Mr L Angus withdrew his notice of a further amendment.

During the closing stages of the meeting, Mr A J Cluness said that the whole point of the motion was to take into account external and important reasons and to listen to what people said, before the Council could make any decision to close a single school.

Mr L Angus said that it was a simple fact that most pupils in Shetland go to school in Lerwick. He said that with regard to primary school provision, there was a lot of evidence to suggest that the circumstances in Lerwick needed to be examined. Mr Angus said he did not want to see Lerwick pupils being any more advantaged over rural schools, but to ensure that they had the same level of provision.

Mr F A Robertson said that parental choice was important to ensure that pupils had the best opportunities available to them in terms of their education. Retaining schools within communities gave pupils a sense of identity and that the recent shared management or headship model had been a great success in the west side and would be a preferred alternative to closures.

In response to a question from Mrs Hawkins, Mr Manson advised that the informal consultation would encompass many different forms of consultation, opposed to the formal consultation required in terms of the legislation which would flow from any decisions made.

Mr W N Stove referred to comparisons being made between the cost of education in Shetland in comparison to cost of that service in Orkney. However, he said it was important to remember that Shetland had 34 schools, whereas Orkney had on 22.

Mr W H Manson said that it was clear that nobody liked change, especially not something that is seen to be detrimental to their way of life. However, he said that the education service in Shetland had to be move into the 21st century, and produce a model which would be

Services Committee

24 June 2004 Public Minutes

sustainable and operate effectively for the foreseeable future. Mr Manson said that it had to be said this Council did have real budgetary problems and if the Education Service did not make the necessary savings, then some other service or services would have to make further savings.

Given that there were no further amendments, Mrs F B Grains concluded the meeting by thanking Members for their participation in the debate, to the audience for listening, and to the Member/Officer Working Group for all their work.

The meeting concluded at 12.20 p.m.

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F B Grains
Chairperson