

Committee Minutes

Consultative Committee with Parents

Edinburgh, 11 March 2008

Present:- Councillors Mrs MacLaren (Convener) and Burns; Bernard Macdonald (Leith Primary), Lynda Flex (Drummond Community High), Tracy Rendall (Craigtintny Primary), Susan Edwards (Victoria Primary), David Kyles (Trinity Academy), Sandy Cruickshank (East Craigs Primary), Armando Ditano (St Augustine's High), David Martin (Broughton High), David Manson (St John's Primary), Tina Woolnough (Blackhall Primary)/Royal High, David Thomson (Royal Mile Primary), Mandy Gallacher (Craiglockhart Primary), Rory Mackenzie (High School Teacher's Representative), Karen Traill (Liberton High), Iain McGillivray (Firrhill High), Alison Walker (Tynecastle High), Ken Aitken (Portobello High), Allan Todd (Fox Covert RC Primary), Jeanna Brady (Bruntsfield Primary), Martin Southern (Bonaly Primary), Nigel Goddard (James Gillespie's High), Neil Sutherland (Gylemuir Primary), Claire Murdoch (Dean Park Primary), Patricia Aitchison (Balerno High), Norma Lynn Devlin (St Thomas of Aquins High), Lorna Whitefield (Kaimies School), Gordon Chrumka (Broughton Primary), Julian Chapman (Fox Covert ND Primary), Gus Meechen (Castlebrae Community High) and Judith Gillespie (Observer, Scottish Parent Teacher Council).

Apologies for Absence:- Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Beckett, Elizabeth Anderton, Donald Craigie, Henrietta Forman, Willie French, Carolyn Girvan, Julia Macintosh, Frank McGrail and Jane Watson.

1 Minute

The minute of meeting of the Consultative Committee with Parents of 15 January 2008 was approved as a correct record.

2 Progress in Reporting for Learning for All Learners 3-18

Alison Kidd, Quality Improvement Officer, Learning and Teaching, presented progress in reporting for learning for all learners 3-18. The key priorities for learning and teaching were outlined. A Short-Life Steering Group had been established to develop guidance on planning and effective reporting within the context of Curriculum for Excellence for all learners 3-18. The guidance would improve the quality of pupils learning experiences.

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In response to questions, she indicated that schools across the city were making good progress with the Assessment is for Learning programme, although they were at stages of development. Reporting to parents was part of the Assessment is for Learning programmes. Information could be obtained from Edinburgh Grid for Learning, <http://egfl.net> and www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess.

Across the city, schools had shared a total of £60,000 pa to take forward developments in aspects programme. The draft reporting format was suitable for all learners 3-18 and was editable. While schools were not required to adopt the format, they were required to evaluate their own reporting processes and systems against the critical features for effective reporting. This information could also be accessed on the Edinburgh Grid for Learning.

The Committee noted the presentation and that any other questions or comments could be submitted to Alison Kidd for consideration by the Steering Group.

3 Children and Families Revenue Budget 2008/09

Iain Shaw, Principal Finance Manager, presented a briefing on the approved Children and Families Department Revenue Budget 2008-2009. The service pressures which had been addressed were outlined and details were provided of the efficiencies and other savings that had to be achieved.

A summary of the impact on schools was given as follows:

- savings target of 1.5% on school budgets (2% to other front line departmental services; 5% to departmental support services)
- no planned further reductions to school budgets.
- additional funding to schools for energy costs – address budget pressure of £1.1m.
- investment in Pupil Information System (SEEMIS) (£0.6m) – would enable time-releasing benefits to schools.
- former Scottish Executive Grant funding to schools protected at current funding levels.

He and the Director of Children and Families answered questions on specific issues identified including:

- the range of budget pressures;
- the need for a benchmarking exercise in relation to PPP1 schools;

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- School Holiday Programmes;
- staffing freeze;
- the impact of the 1.5% savings target for schools;
- the need to ensure that efficiency savings were sustainable and that the budget was kept to.

The Committee noted the presentation.

4 Children and Families Estate Evaluation

4.1 Feedback From Forum

The Convener provided information on discussions at recent meetings of the Cross-party Forum. In addition to contributions from parental representatives feedback had been received from Head Teachers and Union representatives.

The main focus, which was to be discussed later in the meeting, was establishing evaluation criteria.

The key theme would be that any proposals for change needed to focus on educational outcomes and improved service for those affected. She did not wish to see a totally rigid application of the criteria and considered that further qualitative ones were needed.

The Convener confirmed that reviews of the Secondary School estate would be postponed for at least three years.

Reference was made to a recent Scotsman article about the review. The Convener had written to the Editor and received an apology over publication of a list of schools it had claimed would be affected. She stressed that this had been a reprint from work done last summer but acknowledged that it must have caused alarm and concern for parents with children at these schools.

Following representations, she accepted that a second Primary School representative should become a member of the Forum and suggested that experience/interest in Special Needs education would be useful. She asked if the Committee wished to continue to have a Secondary School representative on the Forum if that sector was not being reviewed.

A replacement for Elizabeth Anderton the Nurseries representative on the Forum was also needed.

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She outlined the time commitment likely to be required of Forum members and the pressures in relating to maintaining confidentiality and avoiding emotional reactions that would be faced.

The parent representatives also commented on the feedback and re-iterated views about the importance of participating.

The Committee agreed:

- 1) That there should continue to be a Secondary School representative on the Forum.**
- 2) That anyone interested should advise the Director of this as soon as possible.**

4.2 Key Issues

Lindsay Glasgow, Asset Planning Manager, outlined the information and criteria, both in the National Context and the Children and Families Estate Evaluation Forum approach, that would be assessed to establish, if and where, changes should be proposed to the pattern of school provision.

Details of the Primary Estate Evaluation were presented. The rationale for review included:

- Demographics
- Educational Benefits
- Managing places and buildings
- Buildings Estate
- Outcomes

She provided detailed information on each of these issues.

During discussion the following questions and issues were identified:

- views of the Department on what might be seen as too big/small a school to deliver good educational and social experiences.
- whether applying weightings to agreed criteria would be appropriate;
- the importance of maintaining schools within the City Centre to support communities;
- being aware of changing demographics and areas of development within the city;
- traditional schools could still be fit for purpose, with appropriate maintenance;
- the importance of taking a city-wide approach to the issue as individual changes would have impacts that spread throughout the area;

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- the importance of maximising developer contribution to ensure that new schools could be built where they were needed.

The Committee noted the presentation and asked the Director to consider the issues raised in taking forward the evaluation work.

4.3 Consultation on Qualitative Criteria

Information on the criteria being developed to support the assessment process required in the estate evaluation work was discussed. Lindsay Glasgow outlined the range of basic and qualitative criteria identified so far. The Convener welcomed further comments either at the meeting or afterwards.

In discussion the following points were made:

- special needs provision should not be a minor criteria
- experience in previous consultations had shown that demographic information drawn from national statistics had been inaccurate when surveyed locally. Independent verification of population projections should be considered.
- applying catchment area intake rules more strictly would reduce pupil movement and increase viability of some schools. The Convener stressed that legislation relating to Placing Requests had to be followed and information was provided on the effects of this.
- Potential capital receipts should not be one of the criteria.

The Committee agreed:

- 1) To note the proposed evaluation criteria and ask the Director to take comments into account as these were developed further.**
- 2) To note that further comments were welcome, possibly following discussion in Parent Councils, and that these should be submitted to the Department in the next two weeks.**

5 Organisational Review of Children and Families

The Director of Children and Families had reviewed the department's management structures in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. A Consultation Paper outlining the Director's proposals would be subject to wide consultation with staff and key stakeholders until 25 March 2008.

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A new management structure for Children and Families was proposed which would address issues identified to improve service delivery and reduce management costs. The Director was working with partners to develop a new Children and Young People's Plan for Edinburgh, which set out the key outcomes to be achieved for Children and Young People in Edinburgh over the next three years and the strategies for achieving these. The new structure proposed four Heads of Service with clear accountabilities as follows:-

- Head of Schools and Community Services (schools, early years, community learning and development).
- Head of Services for Vulnerable Children (children's social work, children with additional support needs, youth justice).
- Head of Resources (finance, human resources, communications, ICT, asset planning, facilities management).
- Head of Planning, Performance and Quality (performance, planning, quality and workforce development).

The following questions and issues were raised during discussion:

- concern about lack of support and accountability for service provision for young people with mild/moderate learning difficulties over school leaving age.
- recognition that introducing a single point of contact for schools was aimed at reducing over management perceptions of Head Teachers.
- concerns about level of service single points of contact could provide when they also had strategic issues to manage and potential loss of current, experienced service managers.
- concern that Head Teachers would be drawn in to strategic issues to the detriment of school service.
- how changes might support reduction in class sizes in P1-3.
- importance of current structure in ensuring that building management/maintenance issues were understood and dealt with promptly.

The Committee agreed:

- 1) To ask the Director to consider the points raised in evaluating responses to the proposed restructuring.**
- 2) To note that further comments were welcomed and should be submitted by 25 March 2008.**

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6 Future Agenda Items

The Director agreed to provide a fuller briefing on Special Needs provision at a future meeting.

Suggestions for future agenda items were welcomed. These could be submitted to the Director or Convener at any time.

7 Recruitment and Selection Training and Information Sessions for Parent Council Members

A programme of courses over April and May 2008 was outlined for Parent Council Members to participate in the recruitment of promoted teachers.

An Information Evening/Morning for Parent Council Chairs would be held at St Thomas of Aquins High School on Wednesday 7 May (6.30-8.30 pm) and Saturday 10 May (10.00am-12.00 noon). Full details would be issued early April.

Further information on courses could be obtained from wendy.gray@edinburgh.gov.uk (Tel: 0131 469 3406) or ailsa.mcleod@edinburgh.gov.uk (Tel: 0131 469 3137).

8 Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday, 13 May 2008 at 6.30 pm.