

Committee Minutes

Consultative Committee with Parents

Edinburgh, 10 March 2009

Present:- Councillors MacLaren (Convener) and Henderson, Katherine Taylor (Parson's Green Primary School), Chris Mark and Penny Radway Leith Primary School), Lesley McGoohan (Wester Hailes Education Centre), Carolyn Girvan (Currie Community High School), Andrea Bracher (Kaimes School), Jeanna Brady (Bruntsfield Primary School), Kenneth Aitken (Portobello High School), Stephan Eisenhardt (Craigentenny Primary School), Julie Main (Bonaly Primary School), Lynda Flex (Drummond Community High School), Katie Hardie (Craiglockhart Primary School), Anne McGowan (St Peter's Primary School), Bruce Sherry (East Craigs Primary School), Nick Crolla (Buckstone Primary School), Alison Walker (Tynecastle High School), Claire Cowell (Stockbridge Primary School), Meg Donaldson (Head Teacher, Prospect Bank School), Henrietta Forman (Braidburn School), Kevin O'Donnell (Trinity Academy), Iain McGillivray (Firrhill High School), Allan Todd (Fox Covert RC Primary School), Andrew MacMillan (Trinity Primary School), Gordon Chrumka (Broughton Primary School), Tina Woolnough (Royal High School/Blackhall Primary School), Patricia Aitchison (Balerno High School), Susan Edwards (Victoria Primary School), John Walker (Juniper Green Primary School), Norma Devlin (St Thomas of Aquins High School), Julie-Ann Sime (Tollcross Primary School), Judith Gillespie (Observer, Scottish Parent Teacher Council), Murray Rankin (Echline Primary School), Karen Traill (Liberton High School) and Anne Heggie (Prospect Bank School).

Apologies:- Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Johnstone, Donald Craigie, David Kyles, Julia Macintosh, Gus Meechan, Tracey Rendall and Jane Watson.

1 Minute

The minute of meeting of the Consultative Committee with Parents of 13 January 2009 was approved as a correct record.

2 Matters Arising

2.1 Oracle e-Business Suite Financial Savings (item 1 of minute of 13 January 2009)

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It was noted that the request for further analysis of the Oracle e-Business Suite and the net benefit per school would be made to the Director of Finance for the next meeting of the Committee.

2.2 Parental Involvement Act (item 2.2)

It was noted that feedback would be provided on the information to be supplied to the Council by Parent Councils in terms of the Parental Involvement Act, to the next meeting of the Committee.

3 School Notional Capacities

The Committee had previously requested further information on the issue of school notional capacities, including national guidance, and spare places within the school estate.

School occupancy levels were assessed against each school's notional capacity to determine how much spare capacity existed. There was no nationally prescribed capacity methodology. The Scottish Executive issued guidance on the type of factors an authority may wish to take into account (December 2004). This guidance was not in any way prescriptive, recognising that this was a devolved matter for individual local authorities to assess. There were differing capacity methodologies in place across Scotland, each reflecting local circumstances.

In the case of the City of Edinburgh Council, a school's notional capacity reflected the optimum operating capacity of the school. The notional capacity methodology was consistently applied across the entire estate, and accordingly needed to be flexible enough to address local circumstances in every school. The notional capacity was not a physical capacity, as it needed to take into account additional factors. A list of the notional capacity and number of class spaces for each City of Edinburgh Council Primary School and Notional Capacity Totals for High Schools was circulated.

Decision

To note the report.

(Reference – report by the Asset Planning Manager, Children and Families, submitted)

4 Short Term/Long Term Absence Cover for Teacher Absences 2007/08

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The Committee had previously requested information on the cost of cover for teacher absences.

Jane Brown, Finance Department, presented an analysis of the short/long term absence cover for 2007/08. Budgets for short-term absence cover were held by schools which allowed flexibility to manage the cover required. The budget for long term cover was held by the Department.

Decision

The Committee noted the information.

5 Budget Settlement

5.1 Children and Families Revenue Budget 2009/10 – Departmental Overview

The Children and Families Revenue Budget for 2009/10 had been developed with three overarching aims:-

Firstly, to deliver a sustainable financial position for the department addressing recurring pressures of £3.5m and delivering the further 2% saving of £5.92m assumed in resource totals. The total savings delivered by the department in setting the budget for next year were therefore £9.4m.

Secondly, to protect the school devolved budgets (as far as possible given the requirement to deliver the 2% across the board savings). New savings initially expected from schools in 2009/10 were a further £3.7m in addition to current reductions.

Thirdly, to ensure that the ongoing process of aligning the children's services budgets with available resources while recognising the risks inherent in managing the increasing demand for child protection services, services to Looked After and Accommodated children, and services to children and young people affected by disability.

5.2 School Supplies Budgets

The standard per capita allocations for school supplies budgets were last increased in 1997. They were £65 per head in primaries and £75 in secondary schools. The effect of the Oracle Top Slice introduced in 2005/06 was outlined. In 2009/10 schools overall would have £250,000 more to spend in devolved budgets on supplies and services than they had in the current year. The standard per capita allocation was however only part of the picture and could not be viewed in isolation from other funding streams, principally National Priorities Action Funds (NPAF) that benefited every school directly. The Council had chosen to deliberately devolve this to schools to be used flexibly in the delivery of the curriculum.

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5.3 Major Project Overview

Details of the Children and Families capital budget 2009/13 were presented.

Major projects programmed for 2009 which had recently reached completion or would achieve completion in the Spring of 2009, included:-

- Flora Stevenson Primary School – provision of a new gym hall with associated changing facilities, a dining hall with a production kitchen, and a music unit.
- Community Centres – Burdiehouse/Southhouse and Cameron House – a variety of facilities in much needed modern accommodation.
- Redhall MLD Primary School – would cater for pupils from Kingsinch and St Nicholas Schools. The project also included a new joint PE facility which would be shared with Longstone Primary School.
- Wave 3 Schools – The New 2009/13 Capital Investment Programme, approved by the Council on 12 February 2009 confirmed additional funding for Wave 3 Schools which brought the current approved funding to £54.5m. This would cover the £41.5m estimated cost of the new Portobello High School. The design team would be appointed in Spring 2009. The available funding would also allow the programme of essential repairs at the five Wave 3 schools to be carried out over the next six years. The initial design work on James Gillespie's High School would also commence in January 2010.
- Corstorphine Primary School – replacement of dining facilities was approved in the Capital Investment Programme 2009-2013.
- Towerbank Primary School – Approval for the extension of the Primary School was granted in the Capital Investment Programme 2009-2013.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- It was confirmed that the issue of energy management and shared premises at Leith Primary was being looked at.
- Work was ongoing in the development of an ICT Strategy, including sustainable ICT. A Working Group was suggested to look at using technology differently in schools in the future.
- School lets would be discussed at the next Children and Families Resources Action Group (CFRAG) meeting.

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- The Neighbourhood Manager (North) was taking a strategic lead on the Curriculum for Excellence. It was agreed that parent workshops would be arranged for discussion on this matter with all Parent Council Chairs invited to attend.
- The use of school rooms for life skills such as cooking and woodwork was suggested. In some areas there were shortages of community facilities. This meant that some schools were almost fully used because of a lack of other available facilities. It was noted that existing Thursday night groups would be looked at individually where required.
- The Convener advised that lets were heavily subsidised. Currently the excess cost to the department for Thursday night lets was over £110,000. These costs came mainly from janitorial overtime, water charges and cleaning charges. Different charges were made for profit and non-profit organisations.
- It was noted that discussions were being held with the Business Manager for Tollcross Primary School regarding heating charges for the school and the attached Community Centre.

Decision

- 1) To note the budget information presented.
- 2) To agree that the issue of reduction of class sizes be discussed at a future meeting, and that a breakdown of capital costs for class size reductions be provided.
- 3) To agree that Parent Workshops be arranged for discussion on Curriculum for Excellence with all Parent Council Chairs invited to attend.
- 4) To note that further information would be provided on school lets following the next CFRAG meeting.
- 5) To note that a future paper would be brought to Committee on the issue of free school meals.

(References – reports by the Director of Children and Families, submitted)

6 School Meals: Feedback from Market Research

Billy Macintyre, Head of Resources, Joyce Nisbett, Client Manager, and Helen McGhee, Facilities Manager, explained that research on school meals was currently being carried out at schools in the city. A wide range of schools across the sectors including PPP, kitchens on site, and transported meals had

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been involved. Focus Groups had been held with pupils of all age groups and parental feedback was being sought. An on-line survey would be sent by link to all Parent Council Chairs.

It had become clear that further areas needed to be explored in detail. The four areas currently being looked at were:

- information
- quality
- choice
- price.

It was hoped a report from the Focus Groups would be made to the Education Committee in June. A pilot would take place around Easter to trial ideas. Meals in Special Schools were arranged according to pupil need but would be included in future research.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- A breakdown of costs and suppliers was requested.
- Dietary needs of children actively involved in sports should also be considered.
- Dining facilities and the way food was served and presented was considered to be important. It was recognised that children wanted to sit together for packed lunches and school meals.
- Some children were put off by queuing systems and the general environment of dining areas, including a lack of space.

Decision

- 1) To note the information presented and that Claire Cowell and Patricia Aitchison had volunteered for a Parent Focus Group to be established.
- 2) To note that interested parents should contact joyce.nisbet@edinburgh.gov.uk .

7 Consultative Committee with Parents (CCWP) – Review of Arrangements

Information was circulated regarding consultation with Parent Councils and Forums on the current arrangements of the CCWP.

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The purpose of the CCWP was to provide a forum for discussion and consultation with parents on educational issues as part of the ongoing Children and Families Parents and Partnership Strategy. The continuing success of the Committee relied on a common understanding of appropriate and relevant business for the CCWP.

It had been agreed to review the current arrangements for membership, terms of office, remit, and for members with support needs, and to reconsider the format, frequency and content of meetings to ensure the purpose of the Committee was being met.

It was proposed that a planned annual calendar be prepared for each academic year. The agenda for each meeting would include at least one item of educational significance as identified by the Department with only one presentation recommended per meeting. Key items of interest would be identified by Heads of Service and brought forward for wider discussion at the CCWP as appropriate. CCWP members could continue to propose agenda items in advance of the meetings, thereby enabling attendance of appropriate officers to address the items. It was proposed that in addition to the existing five meetings of the CCWP per academic year, there would be two Focus Groups of up to 12 members with specific topics in mind taking into account parental views on key subjects such as the Curriculum for Excellence. In addition a meeting would be held in December for all parent Councils for Revenue Budget consultation.

Decision

- 1) To note that Parent Councils and Forums were requested to provide feedback on the suggested new format to audrey.palmer@edinburgh.gov.uk by 24 April 2009.
- 2) To note that feedback would be prepared for discussion at the May meeting of the CCWP.
- 3) To note that the matter of CCWP papers being made available earlier for meetings, would be included in the Review.

(Reference – report by the Director of Children and Families, submitted.)

8 Additional In-Service Day

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning had advised authorities in January that an additional in-service day for sessions 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 to focus on the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence, was to be arranged. Following consultation, Parent Councils and Head Teachers had been advised that the additional in-service day for this year would be Wednesday 20 May 2009.

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Decision

- 1) To note the information.
- 2) To request that further information on the responses received to the consultation be provided, including the timescale of the consultation.

9 Parents and Curriculum for Excellence

Learning and Teaching Scotland were looking for a parent to join a virtual group which would act as a sounding board for Curriculum for Excellence, looking at how effective the LTS communications and information were. Requests for further information and intimations of interest were to be forwarded to: graham.douglas@edinburgh.gov.uk

10 Involving Parents

Details were circulated of the Edinburgh Parental Involvement Strategy, the aim of which was to build on existing good practice whilst creating new opportunities for parents, carers, schools, young people, communities and the Council to work together.

Parent Councils and members of the CCWP were asked to feed comments to graham.douglas@edinburgh.gov.uk or david.maguire@edinburgh.gov.uk.

11 Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday, 12 May 2009 at 6.30 pm in the City Chambers, Edinburgh.