

Note of meeting

Item 2.1

Consultative Committee with Parents

6.00 pm, Thursday, 3 October 2019

Dunedin Room, City Chambers, Edinburgh

Present:

Elected Members

Councillors Perry (Convener) and Burgess (substituting for Councillor Mary Campbell)

Locality Groups – Parent Representatives

Kevin Kealy (Nether Currie Primary School Parent Council)

Gareth Oakley, Southwest Locality (Craiglockhart Primary School Parent Council)

Alex Ramage, South East Locality (Education Children & Families Parent Rep)

Naomi Barton, South West Locality (Currie Community High School Parent Council)

Melissa Wilson, North West Locality (Fox Covert Primary School)

Billy Samuel, Northwest Locality (Corstorphine Parent Council)

Becky Entwistle, (Royal High Primary School Parent Council)

Simon Preston (Abbeyhill Primary School Parent Council)

Raul Pardinaz-Sotu (James Gillespie's Primary School Parent Council)

Connect

Sara McFarlane

Officers in Attendance

Alistair Gaw, Executive Director for Communities and Families

Andy Gray, Head of Schools and Lifelong Learning

Bernadette Oxley, Head of Children's Services

Arran Finlay, Senior Education Officer, Communities and Families

Jack Simpson, Senior Education Officer, Communities and Families

David Latimer, Operations Manager, Facilities Management

Sean Bell, Senior Manager, Children with Additional Support Needs

Murdo McLeod, Technical Operations Manager, Resources

Apologies

Councillors Mary Campbell, Eileen Prior and Derek McNeil.

1. Minute

Decision

To approve the note of meeting of the Consultative Committee with Parents of 16 May 2019 as a correct record.

2. Rolling Actions Log

Decision

To agree that the Rolling Actions Log would be circulated at the next meeting of the Consultative Committee.

3. Director's Update (Including Comments on Committee Reports)

A verbal update was provided by the Executive Director for Communities and Families. He gave apologies for the lack of a Rolling Actions Log. There had been a number of changes in personnel, however, this would be taken up at the next meeting.

He reported that the Council was now heavily engaged in preparing its budgets. It was committed to defending budgets for schools, however, this was a bigger challenge every year as austerity in public services was being implemented. There was a requirement to save £100m before 2022. This put pressure on the budget for schools and it was necessary to raise public awareness regarding budget.

The Scottish Government had announced it would not enact that part of the 2014 legislation in respect of the named person. The Council had not put together a named person service, but they were working consistently with partners and families. The Scottish Government would put forward policy re-shaping the legislation. New guidance would be provided at the appropriate time.

A significant number of reports were scheduled to be presented to the Education, Children and Families Committee including a report on promoting equality. There were concerns that bullying was continuing to be under-reported and there was no room for complacency, especially regarding protected groups. There had been a deputation at the Council from BME young people who had spoken about their experiences. There would also be an update on the Children's Services Plan, a report on a statutory consultation for Kirkliston and South Queensferry Primary Schools and an update on Early Years expansion. Additionally, there were some reports on learning statistics which would be a vehicle to improve attainment in schools.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- Some of the points on the Rolling Actions Log from the meeting in May were relevant and could be brought back.
- Parents should email Alex Ramage if they wanted issues raised for them at the Committee.

Decision

To note the updates and that Committee Members should contact the Executive Director for Communities and Families, Head of Schools and Lifelong Learning or the Head of Children's Services if they had any questions.

4. Facilities Management (Maintenance Programme, School Cleaning and Sustainability)

An update was provided by Murdo McLeod on facilities management. He indicated that in respect of maintenance, the previous financial year saw the completion of first year of the investment programme. Schools received a large proportion of that. This was split into two areas including management works, which involved a planned preventative maintenance programme (PPM) to ensure that buildings remained safe and dry. Last year £21,000,000 was spent on the estate, 85% of which was spent on Communities and Families properties. In this financial year, the trend would continue with £30,000,000 being allocated. Next year, there would be focus on secondary schools. This meant an unprecedented level of activity across the estate.

Work would take place not just during breaks/holidays. There was focus to bring properties up to "B" category, which included most properties. 16 per cent were in category "C" and it was intended to improve categories C and D. For the PPM programme, some of this was a statutory requirement to carry out inspections. The Authority had instigated the fabric inspection programme. They were in the process of re-tendering their supply list, so they now had single suppliers for providing a service. It was hoped to have this in place in 2020. Improvements included installing carbon monoxide alarms on boilers and a ceiling inspections programme.

Discussion took place and the following issues were raised:

- The need for work to take place and the need for better communication
- Work should commence on the Royal High School PS as soon as possible
- There should be a joined-up plan to ensure that work on schools commenced as soon as possible. It was noted that some schools were starting holidays early to allow this although it was acknowledged that early closure of schools would not please all parents
- Work taking place during holidays distracted teachers when preparing lessons
- Schools should stay open most of the time, however, the safety of the pupils was the overriding concern
- Unpredictable events such as adverse weather sometimes prevented work
- The commencement of work often uncovered additional parts of building to be repaired
- The team dealing with Currie HS had met most of the outstanding items
- Progress was being made to expand the pool of contractors.

David Latimer reported on soft FM cleaning and indicated that they were moving to the transition phase and were moving current staff into new areas. The Authority were working hard to establish a new scientific model for cleaning. They were trying to recruit 150 new staff, however, this was proving difficult.

Discussion took place and the following issues were raised:

- Some schools were not being cleaned properly, however, the new system should improve matters over the next few months.
- The main issue trying to recruit up to 15% new cleaners.
- Whether the remit included sporting facilities within schools.
- Which areas were the responsibility of the Council for cleaning?
- Whether there was a maintenance and sanitation regime and funding for this.
- There were different regimes in different schools. Usually schools were responsible for maintenance, unless there were maintenance contracts.
- There was a need to sanitise the all-weather surfaces and to use best practice.
- There was concern about the smell of toilets in some schools and the use of poor cleaning products.

Decision

- 1) As the entire year was blocked out for maintenance at the Royal High Primary School, to check out if this could continue into the next academic year.
- 2) To check out who was responsible for outside surfaces at schools.
- 3) To check out the bad state of the toilets in the Royal High School and to confirm who was responsible for the maintenance and cleaning of toilets.

Note:

The best way to check out about the cleanliness of the toilets in school was through the head teachers.

5. Improving Communications

An update was provided by Executive Director for Communities and Families. He indicated that there was need to discuss improving conditions. There were issues such as the maintenance programme, rising rolls and the need for consultation around the school estate. There was a need for something more systematic. With school lets, there were the issues of cover and cost. There was some good work going on in the locality groups and there was good potential with the parent committees and a need for better communication between schools and parents. The Authority tended to be good with a crisis, such as the PPP crisis or severe weather, but seemed to be more challenged with planned activities.

Discussion took place and the following issues were raised:

- The best channel of communication was through the head teacher
- There should be more direct communication between council departments and parent councils
- It might be possible to circulate the agenda and minutes for locality meetings, using the Council website

- Most schools had active parent councils, however, there were still some hard to reach areas with continuing issues of low parental representation at meetings and some parents not getting information. The good work of Parent Councils should be promoted
- There needed to be something accessible and usable for all parents such as a newsletter
- Due to changes in personnel in parent councils there were issues with email addresses
- In respect of communication and strategy, it was necessary to identify best practice and to ensure accessibility and equality
- It was necessary to look at issues such as providing a crèche
- A sub-committee might be able to determine how all the parent councils could operate the same system especially for providing information.
- Whether it was possible for CONNECT to provide training for parent councils
- There should be discussions to monitor and improve locality meetings

Decision

- 1) Officers to explore the possibilities of providing creche facilities to allow parents to attend parent councils.
- 2) To note that the Executive Director for Communities and Families would contact all Head Teachers to ensure that the authority had the most up to date contact email addresses for all current chairs of Parent Councils.
- 3) To ask the Council's Communications Team for ideas on how to improve the communication framework.
- 4) To ask for a report back to the meeting on how parent councils communicate with parent bodies and what type of apps might be appropriate to facilitate this and to improve communication to parents in general.

6. Teaching Workforce

Jack Simpson, Senior Education Officer, provided an update on Teaching Workforce. He indicated that there were no current major issues regarding recruitment, the PVG process was now being done by business managers at school level and they were communicating directly with Disclosure Scotland.

The most recent supply list advert had closed in September. There were 65 applications for primary schools, 51 for secondary schools and 16 for special schools.

The Recruitment Section of Human Resources now had its own twitter channel. The Annual Teacher Vacancies Survey took a snapshot of vacancies from 18 September and details were provided of the figures.

Decision

To note the update.

7. Locality Representatives – Key Issues

City-Wide Special Schools Group

It was reported that chairs of parent councils were trying to find a way of including parents of children with additional support needs in mainstream schools to get better representation at meetings. Consideration was given to an open forum discussion evening, perhaps twice a year.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- There would be practical difficulties bringing children to meetings to ensure accessibility for parents
- If the logistical challenges were resolved, potential gains should be assessed
- There might have to be a risk assessment
- Parent Council meetings in special schools tended to be well attended

Decision

- 1) To consider having a discussion forum twice annually with parent councils and senior officers.
- 2) To have a risk assessment on transport for children with special needs.

South West Locality Group

Concerns had been expressed by some parents Their children would be attending Currie High School, however, there was concern about the lack of information of the development of the new school. There were issues with technology, and implications for budgets, design and ongoing maintenance. Reference was then made to Passivhaus as a positive model.

The Director indicated that some further detailed discussion was needed. There was timetable and process in place and he understood that engagement was required. With regard to Passivhaus this was a model for sustainable buildings, with zero carbon.

Discussion took place and the following points were made:

- The building design at Passive House was unique
- This was well-funded and would be a positive development, but engagement was needed
- Generally, there was not good communication between schools and parents
- There would be a report coming to committee soon on the use of IT in schools. An individual from Tynecastle would report back on ways to progress matters
- There was a delay with the construction of the Early Centre due to the re-pouring of the cement slab
- There were concerns from some parents about lessons on sex health, however, they had the right to withdraw their children from these lessons
- The Catholic Church had agreed to it, but it was up to the discretion of the schools
The same principles applied for non-denominational schools

Decision

- 1) To ensure that a communication was issued to parents and that a timetable for discussion and consultation was made clear on the development of the new High School at Currie.
- 2) To ensure that the eco-friendly technology at Passivhaus was considered.
- 3) To ensure that newsletters to parents were sent to schools timeously.
- 4) To explore why there was a three-week delay on the re-pouring of the concrete slab at the Early Centre Build.

North West Locality Group

Most of the issues had been covered. After the Locality Meeting, there had been a statutory consultation. The feasibility study for Craigmount seemed to question if there was capacity for expansion and for enough social space.

Decision

To note the update.

South East Locality Group

It was reported that the Wi-Fi for schools was ongoing, with a trial continuing at James Gillespie's High School. Regarding the term dates around exam week and Easter, certain schools such as Liberton High School had been told not to return to school after Easter, but to go to exam leave. Many children attended schools during exam time as not all courses had exams. The Easter holidays had been late this year, which meant that there was only a short break before the exam period.

Decision

To note the update.

North East Locality Group

The representative from Duddingston indicated that they had attended the locality meeting regarding road safety. Some of the roads were in a very bad state, the road markings were very poor and motorists were parking on the main road. They were attending the Transport Committee next week as a delegation. They would like to have safer routes to schools, shared paths and to stop people parking outside the school.

The Convener indicated that if this was not a main road, it would be easier to tackle. However, he would discuss this with officers.

Decision

The representative to email the Convener if he was not getting any progress with Safer Routes to School with the Transport and Environment Committee.

8. Voting Rights for Additional Members of the Education, Children and Families Committee

The Convener asked the Committee to consider the principle of voting rights being applied to all additional members of the Education, Children and Families Committee.

Discussion took place and the following issues were raised:

- The possible advantage of a second parent representative being a “floating” person who could attend on an “issue by issue” basis, however, this might pose some difficulties, as there was a set agenda, the content of which was not available publicly until one week before the meeting
- It was possible that developments in the youth environment could transition to the parental environment
- The Education, Children and Families Committee could consider a range of options, provided they complied with standing orders
- That there should be representative from the West Catchment Area
- All the parent councils could discuss this and nominate a representative
- In respect to the parental engagement strategy, there would be a report to the Parental Engagement Group in January 2020
- A second representative would not undermine the validity of a deputation
- There might be a challenge to religious representatives by their voting rights being removed
- The religious representatives were composed of one Roman Catholic, one Church of Scotland and one Inter-Faith representative
- Religious representatives did not represent the whole community, however, parent representatives were not elected either. Only Councillors were directly elected
- The parental body was the biggest stakeholder and should have effective representation
- If a vote in Committee was lost, the Full Council could overturn it
- This was a contentious issue as religious representatives had been able to vote for 40 years
- Whether there should be a rebalancing and if all the non-elected representatives should be allowed to vote
- This might be an opportunity to include the population that had been difficult to reach

Decision

- 1) To agree in principle that voting rights should be applied to all additional members of the Education, Children and Families Committee but to consider how this would work in practice.
- 2) To consider the possibility of there being a second parent representative appointed to the Education, Children and Families Committee.

9. Connect Update

Sarah McFarlane gave an update on CONNECT, which included the following:

- The information session.
- Media
- Data protection.
- The live survey in respect of out of school care.
- The AGM and lecture which would be in March 2020.
- The leaflet early years.

It was confirmed that there were courses run by CONNECT in November and if people wanted to attend then they could sign up for these online.

Decision

To note the update.

10. National Parent Forum - Update

It was noted that the post for the National Parent Forum representative was at present vacant.

Decision

To find out the name of the individual from James Gillespie's Primary School who was considering as being put forward as the representative for the National Parent Forum.

11. Any Other Business

11.1 Financial Impact of Absenteeism

Decision

To get information on the financial impact of absenteeism of staff in schools and to circulate this to the Committee.

12. Date of Next Meeting

12.1 To be confirmed.