

COMMUNITY SERVICES
STANDING SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of meeting in County Buildings, Wellington Square, Ayr,
on 7th December 2010 at 1.00 p.m.

Present: Councillors Hugh Hunter (Chair), Ian Douglas, Ann Galbraith, Elaine Little and Philip Saxton.

Apologies: Councillors John Allan, Bill Grant and Alec Oattes.

Attending: H. Garland, Executive Director – Children and Community; B. McInroy, Head of Service and School Management; D. Burns, Manager (Housing Policy and Strategy); P. Linton, Performance and Change Management Manager; G. Boyce, Service Planning and Performance Management Officer; and A. Gerrish, Committee Administrative Officer.

Also attending: Councillors Andy Campbell, Douglas Campbell, Brian Connolly, Sandra Goldie, Mairi Low, John McDowall, and Helen Moonie.

1. Item for Call-in – Proposed Closure of Cairn Primary School, Maybole.

Reference was made to the Minutes of the Leadership Panel of 23rd November 2010 (Page 593, paragraph 3) when that Panel, having considered a report (issued) of 8th November 2010 by the Executive Director – Children and Community, decided:-

- (1) to approve the proposal document on the closure of Cairn Primary School, Maybole; and
- (2) to request the Executive Director – Children and Community to issue the proposal document for consultation to all interested parties and to report the results of the consultation to a future meeting of the Council.

The Panel was advised that the report had been called-in twice for the reasons as detailed in the call-in papers.

The Chair invited Councillor Low to explain her reasons for the call-in and, thereafter, the Panel heard Councillor Low ask

Question 1 For additional information on the breakdown of financial savings, including a breakdown of staff changes?

Answer 1 The Head of Service and School Management issued a list detailing a breakdown of financial savings.

Question 2 For an explanation of effect on the level of education provision of Gardenrose and Carrick Schools, with particular reference to the Curriculum of Excellence?

Answer 2 The Head of Service and School Management advised that integration of Cairn into Gardenrose would have no detrimental effect on the education of the children attending, staffing levels would be consistent with National and Council policies and quality assurance systems would be maintained. If P7 classes were accommodated within the Carrick Academy building, there would be clear opportunities for curricular progression and enhancement through joint planning with the primary and secondary staff. There would also be a number of management issues, but these were not viewed as insurmountable.

Question 3 What were the safety considerations for pupils from Cairn Primary attending Gardenrose Primary?

Answer 3 The Head of Service and School Management advised that School crossing patrollers were presently in place at the bottom of Maybole High Street and at the path leading from Culzean Road to Cargill Avenue and if any concerns were raised during the consultation process, colleagues in Roads would be asked to carry out a road crossing assessment. Road safety was assessed on the presumption that pupils would be accompanied by a responsible adult.

Question 4 What were the safety considerations for staff and pupils at Gardenrose Primary particularly at the start and end of the school day?

Answer 4 The Head of Service and School Management advised that all pupils resident in Maybole were within the designated walking distance to school of two miles. Traffic issues were caused by parents dropping children off at school and this was very difficult to control.

Question 5 What would be the effect on options if the dining hall facility at Cairn Primary was not replaced?

Answer 5 The Head of Service and School Management advised that although not replacing the dining hall would save approximately £1.3m, significant works estimated at £580,000 would still be required to address other condition issues with the building.

Question 6 What would be the effect on education provision on the use of temporary buildings?

Answer 6 The Head of Service and School Management advised that it was anticipated that additional accommodation would be required for options 2 and 3 and the costs contained in the proposal paper were based on a small, permanent extension to Gardenrose Primary School of either a 1 or 2 classrooms and that any additional accommodation would be provided through a permanent extension to the existing school buildings and that estimated costs had been included in the proposal paper. However modern temporary accommodation for schools was very high quality and there would be no detriment to the education of pupils if the Council were to decide to use temporary classrooms rather than a permanent extension.

Question 7 What would be the likely effect on education provision, compared to current levels?

Answer 7 The Head of Service and School Management advised that integration of Cairn into Gardenrose would have no detrimental effect on the education of the children attending, staffing levels would be consistent with National and Council policies and quality assurance systems would be maintained.

Question 8 Explain the education enhancement of the merge for the primary school pupils?

Answer 8 The Head of Service and School Management advised that a merged Gardenrose Primary School would provide an integrated educational facility with appropriate accommodation and resources for delivering a modern curriculum and that the merger would also allow the Council to target investment in one building rather than two, thereby improving the educational environment and facilities for all non-denominational pupils in Maybole.

Question 9 Explain the benefits and likely savings of a 3-18 Campus?

Answer 9 The Head of Service and School Management advised that although the Council was committed to consulting on the idea of a 3-18 campus in 2011, this had not been included in the current proposal document.

The Chair then invited Councillors Goldie, McDowall and Moonie to explain their reasons for their call-in and, thereafter, the Panel heard them enquire

Question 1 For additional information on options appraisal in terms of capacity and the implications of Primary 7 relocating to Carrick Academy?

Answer 1 The Head of Service and School Management advised that the proposal to accommodate P7 pupils in the Carrick Academy building had been suggested in order to provide ready access to specialist staff and accommodation to assist in the delivery of curriculum for excellence.

Question 2 Can clarification be given on transport costs?

Answer 2 The Head of Service and School Management advised that there were no additional transport costs at this stage.

Question 3 What consideration had been given to the Single Outcome Agreement outputs, the proposed Scottish Government/Local Authority Budget Settlement and previous commitments in relation to maximum class sizes?

Answer 3 The Head of Service and School Management advised that the class structures in the combined school model reflected the legal requirements of current class sizes legislation, P1 classes at 25 maximum and P2-P3 at a maximum of 30 pupils, all other classes have a 33 pupil maximum of 25 pupils in a composite class. The class structures for the merged school indicated that all classes would be well within these maximum limits.

Following a full discussion, questions and comments were raised by Councillors Connolly, Goldie, Low, McDowall, Moonie and Members of the Panel in relation to:- staff transfers, accommodation of P7 pupils at Carrick Academy, traffic concerns, the dining hall at Cairn, staffing levels, open plan education, porta-cabins, visitation to sister schools, class sizes and nursery provision and the relevant Officers responded accordingly.

Decided: to refer this item back to the Leadership Panel recommending that the proposal to close Cairn Primary School be reconsidered.

2. Item for Call-in – Proposed Closure of St Ann’s Primary School, Mossblown.

Reference was made to the Minutes of the Leadership Panel of 23rd November 2010 (Page 594, paragraph 4) when that Panel, having considered a report (issued) of 8th November 2010 by the Executive Director – Children and Community, decided:-

- (1) to approve the proposal document on the closure of St Ann’s Primary School, Maybole; and
- (2) to request the Executive Director – children and community to issue the proposal document for consultation to all interested parties and to report the results of the consultation to a future meeting of the Council.

The Chair invited Councillors Andy Campbell, John McDowall and Helen Moonie to explain their reasons for the call-in and, thereafter, the Panel heard them enquire

Question 1 What were the implications of staff transfer from St. Ann’s Primary to St. John’s Primary?

Answer 1 The Head of Service and School Management advised that transfer of teaching staff was covered in the local JNCT agreement on school closures and amalgamations and that non-teaching staff would be accommodated within the Council’s current managing change policy.

Question 2 Give detailed costings of the closure of St. Ann’s Primary School.

Answer 2 The Head of Service and School Management issued a list detailing the costing of the closure of St. Ann’s Primary School.

Question 3 What will the potential impact be on the loss of a successful joint denominational campus?

Answer 3 The Head of Service and School Management explained that despite best intentions at the commencement of the joint campus in 1998, the joint working between the two schools on the campus had not been as successful as he would have liked. The schools operated as two separate entities on the same site and that he was of the view that this model was not in the best interests of denominational education in the Annbank/Mossblown area.

Following a full discussion, questions and comments were raised by Councillors Campbell, McDowall, Moonie and Goldie and Members of the Panel in relation to:- the closure of the only joint denominational/non-denominational campus in South Ayrshire, financial issues, class sizes, ownership of campus and the additional 500 houses being built in the area and the relevant Officers responded accordingly.

At this point, the Panel agreed to adjourn for 10 minutes to allow a Legal Representative to be sought to advise on the options open to the panel in terms of Standing Orders. The panel then reconvened and received advice from the Head of Legal and Administration.

Decided: to refer this item back to the Leadership Panel recommending that the proposal to close St. Ann's Primary School be reconsidered as it is the only joint denominational/non-denominational campus in South Ayrshire.

Councillor Saxton left the meeting during consideration of the above item.

3. Minutes of previous meeting.

Decided: to note the minutes of the meeting of 3rd November 2010 (issued).

4. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Review Update.

Reference was made to the Minutes of 20th January 2010 (Page 55, paragraph 4) and there was submitted a report (issued) of 18th November 2010 by the Executive Director – Children and Community

- (1) outlining the progress of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan Review to date;
- (2) informing that during October and November, joint meetings had been held with stakeholders including Tenants, Elected Members and Officers to discuss the business plan, review process, tenant's concerns and preferences, consideration of a new and fairer rent structure and capital investment priorities;
- (3) advising
 - (a) that a Tenant's Conference on 27th November 2010 had considered potential savings, amendments to repairs delivery and changes to the rent structure; and
 - (b) that tenant's concerns regarding current expenditure related to:-
 - the level of funds paid to General Services (i.e. central support costs, pest control and property trading surplus); and
 - grounds and footpath maintenance in former Council only estates being paid for in full by the HRA; and
- (4) reporting
 - (a) that initial findings had suggested that the current Business Plan was unaffordable and meant that savings would have to be made if the Council was to avoid significant rent increases in future years for its tenants and that a number of issues identified within the review were being explored by Officers to identify potential savings to the Business Plan;
 - (b) that in consultation with tenants, the Council would seek to agree a rent increase for 2011/12 followed by a fixed rent increased for 2012/13 until 2015 to ensure the Scottish Housing Quality Standard would be met;

- (c) that the HRA Business Plan was on target for completion in December 2010; and
- (d) that the final report, recommendations and rent setting until 2015 would be presented to the Special Council on 19th January 2011 for consideration.

Decided: to note the contents of the report.

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5. **Scrutiny Reviews 2011/12 – Children and Community.**

There was submitted a report (issued) of November 2010 by the Executive Director – Children and Community recommending two areas of review planned for the next year within Children and Community.

Decided: to recommend that this Panel's programme of Scrutiny Reviews in 2011/12 comprise:-

- (1) the roll out of a Re-ablement Service Model in South Ayrshire; and
- (2) the effectiveness of the current arrangements in Family Support Services.

6. **Progress Against the Council Corporate Plan to 30th September 2010.**

The Panel agreed to continue this item to a Special meeting to be arranged prior to the Leadership Panel on 18th January 2011.

The meeting ended at 3.15 p.m.