

COMMUNITY SERVICES
STANDING SCRUTINY PANEL.

Minutes of meeting in County Buildings, Wellington Square, Ayr,
on 27th April 2011 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillors John Allan (Chair), Ian Douglas, Ann Galbraith, Bill Grant, Hugh Hunter, Alec Oattes and Philip Saxton.

Apology: Councillor Elaine Little.

Attending: H. Garland, Executive Director – Children and Community; V. Andrews, Head of Legal and Administration; B. McInroy, Head of Service and School Management; K. Leinster, Head of Community Care and Housing; C. Monaghan, Head of Policy, Performance and Communication; J. Cronin, Strategic Service Planning Manager; D. Burns, Policy and Strategy Manager; E. Currie, Principal Accountant; P. Linton, Performance and Change Management Manager; and A. Gerrish, Committee Administration Officer.

Also Attending: Councillors Andy Campbell, Douglas Campbell, John McDowall, Helen Moonie and Tom Slider.

1. Item for Call-in – Provision of Free School Meals in P1 to P3.

Reference was made to the Minutes of the Leadership Panel of 19th April 2011 (Page 238, paragraph 1) when that Panel, having considered a report (issued) of 4th April 2011 by the Executive Director – Children and Community, decided to approve the proposal to provide a free nutritious meal to all pupils in P1 to P3 who lived in the 30% most educationally deprived communities in South Ayrshire as identified by postcode.

The Panel was advised that the report had been the subject of a call-in (issued) for the following reasons:-

- (1) additional information required in relation to the statistics between Appendix 1 and 2 of the report regarding the methodology and statistics which informed them; and
- (2) to explore whether information was available to assess the impact of universal benefit and whether this has been taken into account, what the potential implications are and whether the report is robust in this respect.

The Chair invited Councillor McDowall to explain his reasons for the call-in and, thereafter, the Panel heard him seek clarification in relation to (1) and (2) above and further commented on the statistics and the contradiction of numbers of additional pupils who would receive free school meals under the new scheme and arrangements, under the previous scheme, how many of these pupils would have qualified anyway under the Scottish Government Income Criteria.

The Head of Service and School Management advised

- that the statistics used to identify the 10 schools in receipt of free school meals for P1 to P3 were taken from free school meals data, clothing grant data and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD);
- that the statistics used for developing the new scheme were taken from educationally deprived statistics within the overall SIMD range and identified the

postcodes of children and families who lived in the most deprived communities in South Ayrshire;

- that the numbers stated were not exact, as circumstances of families were always changing;
- that it was unlikely that there had been any double counting in relation to free school meals from the Scottish Government and the Council;
- that children who were already receiving free school meals in the 10 schools outlined in Appendix 1 of the report would continue to do so; and
- that with regard to the Welfare Reform Bill 2011 and the proposed introduction of Universal Credit which would provide a single streamlined benefit, timescales for this were not known and if the Bill became legislation and information became available with regard to free school meals, he would report back to the Panel.

Following a discussion, various questions and comments were raised by Councillor Moonie and Members of the Panel in relation to free school meals and the Head of Service and School Management responded accordingly.

Councillor Saxton then moved that the report be referred back to the Leadership Panel for further consideration with regard to fairness and transparency and that free school meals for P1 to P3 should be equal across all schools.

Councillor Saxton failed to find a seconder and therefore his Motion fell.

Councillor Saxton requested that his dissent be recorded.

Decided: following review, that the decision of the Leadership Panel in respect of this matter be confirmed and implemented.

2. Item for Call-in – Results of the Formal Consultation on the Proposed Closure of St. Ann’s Primary School.

Reference was made to the Minutes of the Leadership Panel of 19th April 2011 (Page, 240 paragraph 4) when that Panel, having considered a report (issued) of 31st March 2011 by the Executive Director – Children and Community, decided to approve

- (1) the closure of St. Ann’s Primary School at the end of school term in June 2011;
- (2) the transfer of all pupils currently registered and enrolled in St. Ann’s Primary School to St. John’s Primary School; and
- (3) to approve the extension of the delineated catchment area for St. John’s Primary School to incorporate the current delineated area for St. Ann’s Primary School.

The Panel was advised that the report had been the subject of two call-ins (issued) for the reasons stated below:-

- (a) 1st call in –
 - to further explore the logic of the assessment at paragraph 4.3.3 of the report;
 - for further information on anticipated savings;

- for further explanation of why it was Officers' opinion that pupils needed to be denied the opportunity for enhanced educational experiences if St. Ann's does not close;
- is it the opinion of Officers that the consultation report accurately reflects the questions and issues raised by parents at consultation meetings; and
- were Officers content that the proposals were consistent with the provisions of the Equality Act; and

(b) 2nd call in –

- despite a widespread consultation process, which rejected the Council's preferred option, this option has prevailed – How then does our consultation process hold up to public scrutiny;
- is consultation now just a legal requirement to be served, rather than an open transparent system, which takes on board opposing views
- more information required on Council's Educational Benefits Statement; and
- why has little thought gone into Option 1, in the Council's proposal document.

The Chair invited Councillors Tom Slider and Andy Campbell to explain their reasons for the calls-in and, thereafter, the Panel heard them seek clarification on the points raised within (a) and (b) above.

The Head of Service and School Management advised

- that the Consultation Process had been carried out under stringent rules scrutinised by HMI;
- that the quality of education was good at St. Ann's Primary School and this was a credit to the staff however, great emphasis was placed on group workings and that the proposed move to a larger school would offer children from St. Ann's Primary School an enhanced range of educational experiences, including significantly enhanced opportunities for children to learn together within a larger group of children of their own age and give them access to a wider range of curricular opportunities, resources and individual support;
- parents should be concerned that children were being taught in smaller schools and that small class sizes were an issue as the school has issues in delivering the full Curriculum for Excellence experience for all pupils; and
- that the Council could not close schools on financial grounds.

Following a full discussion, comments and questions were raised by various Councillors and Members of the Panel in relation to:- group working; peer groups; curriculum for excellence; one to one teaching; property costs, budget savings; the School Estate, the value of village education; and catchment areas and the Head of Service and School Management and the Principal Accountant responded accordingly.

Councillor Allan, seconded by Councillor Saxton, moved that the Panel refer this matter back to the Leadership Panel recommending that as the educational case had not been proved sufficiently to warrant the closure of St. Ann's Primary School, the status quo should remain.

By way of Amendment, Councillor Grant, seconded by Councillor Hunter, moved that the Panel agree with the decision of the Leadership Panel but with the recommendation that the choice of either St. Ninians or St. Johns Primary Schools as the catchment area should be further reviewed.

There was a request that the vote be taken by calling the roll.

The Head of Legal and Administration took the vote by calling the roll as follows:-

John Allan	Motion
Ian Douglas	Motion
Ann Galbraith	Motion
Bill Grant	Amendment
Hugh Hunter	Amendment
Alex Oattes	Motion
Philip Saxton	Motion.

Two Members voted for the Amendment and five for the Motion. The Motion was accordingly declared to be carried.

Decided: following review, to refer this matter back to the Leadership Panel recommending that as the educational case had not been proved sufficiently to warrant the closure of St. Ann's Primary School the status quo should remain.

3. Item for Call-in – Interim Accommodation, Elba Gardens, Ayr.

Reference was made to the Minutes of the Leadership Panel of 19th April 2011 (Page 245, paragraph 12) when that Panel, having considered a report (issued) of 23rd February 2011 by the Executive Director – Children and Community, decided to approve the use of sixteen units of bedsit accommodation at Elba Gardens in Ayr (previously sheltered housing) as interim accommodation for households who were assessed as homeless under the Homeless persons legislation.

The Panel was advised that the report had been the subject of a call-in (issued) for the following reasons:-

- (1) to further explore the rigour of the equalities impact assessment;
- (2) for further information regarding interim accommodation and future accommodation as it relates to proposed supported tenancies within Elba Gardens; and
- (3) if this proposal was judged to be successful, what is the performance measurement of success.

The Chair invited Councillor McDowall to explain his reasons for the call-in and, thereafter, the Panel heard him seek clarification on the points raised at (1) to (3) above.

The Head of Community Care and Housing, the Strategic Service Planning Manager and the Portfolio holder advised

- that the poorest building at Elba Gardens had been demolished and that the remaining property at Elba Gardens would be brought up to standard to enable its use over the short to medium term;
- that this was a pilot project for an interim period to help support people until they become ready to move on to take up a tenancy;

- that there would be a team of staff in place with a number of responsibilities to develop life skills; and
- that the measure of success would be if this project worked and people move through the system with a better support mechanism in place into permanent homes, the consequence of anti-social behaviour that followed would reduce and if this project was successful, the Council would examine the possibility of replicating it in other places.

Various questions and comments were raised by Councillors McDowall and Moonie in relation to:- equalities issues, discrimination, interim accommodation; stock availability; and staffing implications, and the appropriate Officers responded accordingly.

Councillor Hunter seconded by Councillor Grant, moved that the decision of the Leadership Panel be confirmed and implemented.

By way of Amendment, Councillor Saxton, moved that the matter be referred back to the Leadership Panel because of its equalities implications.

Councillor Saxton failed to find a seconder and therefore his Amendment fell.

Councillor Saxton requested that his dissent be recorded.

Decided: following review, that the decision of the Leadership Panel in respect of this matter be confirmed and implemented.

Adjournment of Meeting.

The Panel agreed to adjourn the meeting at 11.35 a.m. for 20 minutes.

Resumption of Meeting.

The meeting resumed at 11.55 a.m.

4. Minutes of previous meetings.

Decided: to note the Minutes of the meeting of 30th March 2011 (issued).

5. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Review Update 5.

Reference was made to the Minutes of 20th January 2010 (Page 55, paragraph 4) and there was submitted a report (issued) of March 2011 by the Executive Director – Children and Community

- (1) outlining the progress with the legacies that exist within the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan;
- (2) informing that the financial legacies that exist include:-
 - Garage Site and Lock Up rental income;
 - Grounds Maintenance, Footpath and Pest Control;
 - Sheltered Housing Wardens and Housing Support Costs;
 - Property Trading Surplus;

- Income from Homeless Accommodation and Salaries recharged from HRA to General Services;
 - Furniture Provision for Temporary Accommodation; and
 - Reduced Charges to Sheltered Housing for double glazing and property improvements;
- (3) advising that these legacies had been discussed with Members through briefing sessions and work was continuing to set out options and in addition to an overview of legacies, Members were presented with the potential financial impact on both the Housing Revenue Account and General Fund through reallocation of these issues;
- (4) intimating that consultation sessions had been held throughout March 2011 with tenants of high management cost stock, including sessions at sheltered housing units in each of the five main towns; and
- (5) concluding that validation of the 30 year capital investment costs would be required to ensure that the Business Plan was viable over the life of the plan and that the validation and survey sample was currently out for tender with a view to the works being completed by the summer.

Questions were raised by a Panel Member in relation to Sheltered Housing and the Policy and Strategy Manager responded accordingly.

Decided: to note the progress and information on legacies within the Housing Revenue Account.

6. Remit from the Leadership Panel: South Ayrshire Council Directorate Plans.

Reference was made to the Minutes of the Leadership Panel of 19th April 2011 (Page 241, paragraph 7) when it had been decided, having considered a report (issued) of April 2011 by the Head of Policy, Performance and Communication,

- (1) to approve the Children and Community Directorate Plan for 2011-14;
- (2) to approve the Corporate Services Directorate Plan for 2011-14;
- (3) to approve the Development and Environment Directorate Plan for 2011-14; and
- (4) to agree to remit these Plans to the relevant Standing Scrutiny Panels, to examine those sections that relate to their specific remits.

The Head of Policy, Performance and Communication referred to an extract (issued) from those plans relevant to the remit of this Panel and that this mapping had been used to present the six monthly performance reports to meetings of this Panel.

Questions were raised by Members of the Panel in the relation to Scottish Housing Quality Standards 2015 and Information Sharing with Strathclyde Police and the Executive Director – Children and Community and the Head of Community Care and Housing responded accordingly.

Decided: to note the updated Directorate Plans.