

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education, Culture and Sport
DATE	24 November 2009
DIRECTOR	Annette Bruton
TITLE OF REPORT	Parent Involvement in Education
REPORT NUMBER:	ECS 09/076

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report serves to inform Committee of actions and progress following Councillor Cormack's Motion. In doing so, the report sets out proposals for developing the leadership role of the Education, Culture & Sport Committee in supporting parent¹ involvement. In particular, it sets out proposals for establishing a representative forum of parent councils. The report also sets out the context for a review of our Parent Involvement Strategy.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Committee:

- (i) Endorses the need to enhance parent representation in Education, Culture and Sports services;
- (ii) Agrees to the establishment of a representative forum of parents as set out in Proposal 1.
- (iii) Consider whether it wishes a further report on parent representation on the Education, Culture & Sport Committee, noting that these issues require to be closely examined, and if so, instruct the Head of Democratic Services to provide such a report to a future meeting

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Should this Committee agree that parents should be members of this Committee, there may be additional costs associated with membership, for example, payments for travel, childcare costs, etc. These cost implications will be clarified as part of the work to be undertaken in relation to recommendation (iii) above.

¹ Note: references to "parent" in this Report include carers and guardians

4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT

Developing and implementing ways of further enhancing parent involvement supports community engagement with local communities and helps to develop a strong partnership with parents.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

As for Financial Implications above, the implications of parent membership of this Committee (for example, to the Orders of Reference, voting issues, confidentiality issues, etc) will be explored as part of the work to do with recommendation (iii).

6. REPORT

6.1 Background

6.2. The former Policy & Strategy (Education) Committee meeting of 28 April 2009 had under consideration the following motion by Councillor Cormack, which had been submitted directly to the Committee:

“That this Council agrees to promote further and to continue to develop parental involvement in the Council’s decision making process and that a report is therefore produced with recommendations for including parents in the work of the main Council committee with education responsibilities, relevant sub-committees and consultation processes.”

6.3 A background report was produced for the June Committee meeting which provided initial information on a range of matters. This included an outline of our current support for parent councils and parental involvement, notably, our termly meetings with parent councils, workshops and other meetings as part of our training and support for parent councils, the provision of advice, and an administrative budget. Officers have also met with the Aberdeen Parent Council Liaison Group (APCLG) on an ad hoc basis, at their request. The APCLG is a group of nine volunteers.

6.4 As well as the background report, officers have had two meetings with Councillor Cormack and a small group of councillors (most recently involving Councillors May, Greig, Jennifer Stewart, Boulton, Laing and Wisely).

6.5 Since the motion, and in accordance with the Committee’s wishes, officers have explored support for parents and parent councils in relation to:

- the existence and nature of arrangements for engaging, liaising, consulting and involving parents and parent councils
- development of a council web site for parents
- training issues

- communication issues, for example, between the Council and parent councils/parents and between any "liaison" group and parent councils

6.6 In order to support our thinking, it is useful to see what other councils are doing and to adopt any best practice. The Scottish Parent Involvement Officer Network (SPION) conducted a general survey across councils in the early summer 2009 and this was mentioned in the June report. This survey unfortunately had a limited response. We therefore decided to conduct our own survey, which asked a small number of more specific questions. Only twelve councils responded and so we should, therefore, be careful of generalising too much on the basis of the survey. However, the results have been summarised in the table shown in Appendix 1. We have also had a few telephone conversations to clarify responses. The key messages and findings are as follows:

- Unsurprisingly there seems to be a variety of practice across councils
- Councils have invested initial effort into helping to establish parent councils and in developing their Parent Involvement Strategies; and are now building upon those foundations
- There seems to be a variety of types of representative forum
- Where a representative forum does exist, nominations come from the equivalent of our Associated School Groupings
- Whilst officers are involved with these forums, the majority do not routinely involve elected Members directly
- Two councils (Inverclyde and Falkirk) have parent representation on their main Education Committee. They allow parents voting rights.

6.7 Developing Parent Council voice and engagement

6.8 Our survey demonstrates that councils are striving to develop their work and approach to implementation of the Parental Involvement Act. This council has made important strides within tight resources. We continue to develop our work with parents and parent councils and recently we convened the first meeting of the Additional Supports Need (ASN) Forum, aimed particularly at engaging and involving more fully parents of children with additional support needs. Notwithstanding our progress so far, sufficient time has elapsed since the Act came into force for us to have gained enough experience in order to take stock of our work and direction of travel.

6.9 The council has statutory obligations, a key aspect of which could be summed up as ensuring that parents and parent councils have an effective "voice". What this means is ensuring that there is always meaningful consultation, participation and engagement with parents and parent councils. This is reflected in our Parental Involvement Strategy. Doing this via a representative forum can be a highly efficient and effective mechanism. However, it should not be the only mechanism.

6.10 As part of this review, a discussion needs to be had about the extent to which the Service supports and guides the development of parent councils and

any representative forum(s). To date we have adopted an approach which has recognised the need for parent councils to establish themselves and to evolve. As experience has been gained, there is now a good case for the need to exercise a more strategic approach, particularly in relation to enhancing parent representation.

6.11 A more strategic approach may include some or all of the following:

- Developing governance arrangements and structures eg. regular joint meetings with parent council representatives and the council (senior officers and perhaps members of Education, Culture & Sport Committee).
- Considering the case for parent or parent council attendance and/or membership at Education, Culture & Sport Committee meetings. This would require input from Legal and Democratic Service as there are a number of complex issues which would require careful consideration.
- Alternatively, or in addition to the above, establishing a Consultative/Advisory Group involving Members, officers and parent/parent council representatives.
- Seeking representatives from parent councils to participate in appropriate working groups. Clearly this would have a number of practical implications eg. availability of any parent chosen to be the representative.
- Establish a representative forum of parents/ parent councils via an open, fair and transparent process.
- Adoption of a joint Partnership Agreement between the council and any representative forum. This could establish agreed ways of working, communication structures, etc.

6.12 A strategic approach would be enhanced by:

- Developing a parent council handbook to support parent councils in fulfilling their roles and aims
- Developing a parents' handbook of advice and guidance on a range of matters (perhaps building upon the current Guide to Education Services)
- Developing a regular parent (council) newsletter
- Development of a parent (council) website
- Development of a corporate approach to training
- Developing a Parent Partnership Coordinator post, building upon the current officer support for parent involvement. It is envisaged that this fulltime post would consist of two people: an officer and a parent sharing the remit and duties of the post.

6.13 In terms of building upon our own foundations in order to enhance parent representation, this report suggests two proposals:

- **Proposal 1:** the Service either organises parent council elections to establish a new body of, say 12 to 24 ASG (Associated Schools Group) members, or simply invites each ASG to nominate one or two representatives to form such a body. The Service would support development of this representative body. We would need to ensure that

the group of 12-24 people included representative(s) of, for example, parents whose children have additional support needs, including those with English as additional language needs, and others.

- **Proposal 2:** as above but with the new body also having representation on this Committee.

6.14 The above proposals to develop parent/parent council representation is consistent with the council's Parental Involvement Strategy. This strategy, which was approved in September 2008, is an ambitious and thorough strategy with 6 Priority Areas and 19 Recommendations for action. A commitment was given to review the Strategy and that commitment could now be actioned as part of the stocktake mentioned in this report.

6.15 As part of that stocktake, and in demonstrating our commitment to enhancing parental involvement, officers facilitated two face-to-face sessions with parent council chairs and representatives on 16 September and 4 November to discuss representation and other matters set out in this report. The meeting on 16 September set the scene, with the meeting on 4 November focusing exclusively on the issues to do with representation. The feedback from the session on 4 November is set out in Appendix 2.

6.16 The meeting on 4 November had as its theme "**Parent Representation: moving forwards strategically**". Participants were provided with an information pack which consisted of an information paper setting out key issues and the Authority's ideas for developing a representative forum drawn from across our schools, as set out above in this report.

6.17 Attending the meeting on 4 November were 17 parent councils, represented by 19 people. The bulk of time at this additional meeting was spent in discussion groups debating a set of the prompt questions that were provided in the Information Pack.

6.18 In terms of "representation", a clear message the Authority has received is that parent councils would wish to be reassured that the Authority will continue to consult on important matters with all parent councils. That assurance was given at the meeting.

6.19 Concluding comments

6.20 It is clear that parent councils wish for the Authority to continue to liaise directly with each parent council. Whilst there is a majority view that there should be a representative forum, there was also a view that an intermediate group is unnecessary. The view and advice of officers is that liaising with all parent councils and working with a representative forum are not mutually exclusive options. Both serve different purposes in terms of enhancing representation and ensure inclusion. In considering the establishment of a representative forum, the key consideration is to ensure an open and transparent process for securing nominations of individuals.

7 REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- (i) Policy & Strategy (Education) Committee Report June 2009
(The background report)
- (ii) Policy & Strategy (Education) Committee Report September 2008
(The Parental Involvement Strategy)

Appendix 1

Parent Representation: survey of councils

Question posed	Summary of responses
<p>Is there a main representative forum or liaison group and what is it called?</p>	<p>Eleven Authorities answered this question</p> <p>There were a range of groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steering Group • Parent Councils' Association • Parent Council Consultative Committee • Focus Group • Parent Council Forum • Parent Council Chairs Group • Parent Council Liaison Group
<p>Does the main group have sub-groups?</p>	<p>Three Authorities answered this question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School/Parent Network • Parent Council Committee • Cluster meetings
<p>How many parents are involved in or attend the main group?</p>	<p>Six Authorities answered this question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Not high" • 35 • 90% of PCs • 30 – 40 • The Forum consists of 2 representatives from each PC.
<p>Are officers and Members involved in the groups?</p>	<p>Six Authorities answered this question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director, 2 Heads of Service and Parental Involvement Officer (PIO) • Director and PIO • Director, Head of Service and PIO • Executive Director and PIO • The Authority chairs the meetings • Convener and Director, Opposition spokesperson, Officers, Committee Clerk, Head teacher from each sector and an Observer from the Scottish PTC
<p>How were parents "selected"?</p>	<p>Seven Authorities answered this question:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five had 1 or 2 representatives of each Parent Council • One had 2 parents from each cluster (8 clusters) • One had 1-2 Secondary PC reps, 1 Primary PC rep, an ASL rep and a Nursery rep for each of its 5 neighbourhoods
Does the group have a remit?	<p>Six Authorities answered this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In two Authorities the meetings were arranged by the Authority to discuss issues • One has a Consultative Committee which allows parental views to be sought and fed into the Committee process • Three cited acting as a “sounding board” and facilitated consultation, co-operation and networking
Frequency of meetings?	<p>Six Authorities answered this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five meet either termly or quarterly • One meets on a 6/7 weekly cycle
Are parents members of the main Education Committee?	<p>Twelve Authorities answered this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eight said “no” • Two said “yes” • One had a member of their “cabinet” involved when discussing Education matters • One had a Consultative sub-committee of the main Education Committee
If so, with voting rights?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two allow voting rights
Does the Authority maintain a PC website?	<p>Twelve Authorities answered this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two have a dedicated Parent Council website • Seven have information or pages on the Authority’s website • Three are currently planning or developing a website
Does the Authority produce a PC Newsletter?	<p>Twelve Authorities answered this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eight produce a newsletter • Four do not

<p>What is the FTE officer and administration dedicated support to Parent Involvement?</p>	<p>Twelve Authorities answered this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 FTE Officer • 0.4-0.5 FTE Officer • Part of a QIO remit along with a range of other responsibilities <p>Administrative support varies from 0 to 1 FTE</p>
<p>Is there a training programme/calendar?</p>	<p>Twelve Authorities answered this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seven have a training programme • Two organise training but not as part of a regular programme • One organises parent conferences • Two do not have a programme
<p>Is there a partnership protocol?</p>	<p>Eleven Authorities answered this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ten do not have a partnership protocol • One has a meeting of the Parent Strategy Group
<p>Other information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some Authorities have a standing Parental Strategy Group • “Listening suppers” are held • Annual family open days • Annual Seminar

Appendix 2

“Parent Representation: moving forwards strategically”

Summary of feedback from 4 November meeting

This meeting was an additional meeting of the Service with parent council chairs and representatives. The bulk of time at this additional meeting was spent in discussion groups debating a set of the prompt questions that had been provided by officers. It was made clear that representatives were not restricted to discussing these questions and were free to self direct themselves within their discussion groups in terms of questions and issues that they felt to be relevant to “representation”.

Prior to the discussion groups, officers gave a brief presentation reiterating the rationale, outlined at the September meeting, for focussing on “representation”. In doing so it was emphasised that it is important to build upon the current strengths of our work on parent involvement, a key aspect of which is representation. Alongside this, it was also emphasised that supporting parents and schools to help facilitate parents to be involved in and engaged with their child’s learning as fully as possible is an equally important matter. In many ways this is the core of the Parental Involvement Act.

In terms of “representation”, a clear message the Authority has received is that parent councils would wish to be reassured that the Authority will continue to consult on important matters with all parent councils. That assurance was given at the meeting.

The presentation, again reiterating what was said in September, briefly outlined what the Authority felt was a strategic approach to developing further parental involvement.

A number of issues were raised during the officer presentation and via the discussion groups. These are summarised below:

- A variety of opinions and perspectives were voiced about representational structures and the related issues.
- As a result, there was no clear consensus on the key issue of the type of representative forum for Aberdeen, but a clear message that parent councils expect the Authority to continue to liaise and engage with all parent councils.
- Representatives of the APCLG felt strongly that the Authority’s ideas set out in the presentation and paper work undermined the group and their work. In particular, they felt that the use of the descriptor ‘self-selected group of nine volunteers’ (which was used in the information provided to parent councils by officers) misrepresented their inception and their role. It was confirmed that the Authority would not wish for the issues being raised by the Authority to be obscured by this and was open to revisions of wording.

- There seemed to be a general view that there is a need for an intermediate level of engagement between individual parent councils and the Authority ie. an appropriate kind of representative forum. However there were also views expressed that an intermediate level was not necessary given that the Authority engages with all parent councils and had given the reassurance that it would continue to do so.
- An APCLG member gave brief feedback on a part of their meeting with parent councils (held in October). APCLG holds its own meetings for parent councils but to date the Authority has not been invited to participate and has not been provided with copies of agendas or other papers. The feedback given was about the response APCLG had received to a questionnaire that the group had devised and distributed to parent councils. The APCLG member highlighted the response to a particular question posed to parent councils about whether or not they (parent councils) consider the APCLG to represent their parent council.
- Support was voiced for the Authority to continue with the current pattern of parent council meetings and to enhance this with engagement through working groups and the development of an interactive website.
- The APCLG highlighted difficulties that they have experienced in communicating with some parent councils and of the difficulty of accessing contact details via schools.
- The nomination for the new national Parent Forum (that is being set up by the Scottish Government) was raised by the APCLG, who expressed concern that the Authority had not fully consulted them or all parent councils in determining the single nomination that the Authority is allowed.
- It was clear that there is a lack of clarity on the relationship between APCLG and the Authority, which merited further discussion between the Authority and APCLG. It became apparent that the Authority and the APCLG do not share identical views on the status of the APCLG as a “representative” forum.
- There was support for the idea of a Parent Partnership Coordinator, but further discussion needed to clarify the role.
- A variety of comments were made about “representation” and a representative forum, all of which are reproduced in the box below:

“A chance to meet and influence the thought process”

“Enable change to happen in a more informal way”

“Already have the foundation of a representative forum in the APCLG and the council should build on their excellent work”

“Chair of APCLG to sit on the Education Committee with voting rights”

“Key features:

-an effective voice

-active listening

-communication (email/written)

-representative

-use of website”

“Communication with ACC working well-very responsive, full, honest explanations with reasons”

“...it would be preferable for Parent Councils to liaise direct with Aberdeen City Council on relevant matters rather than through an intermediate body”