POLICY AND STRATEGY (EDUCATION) COMMITTEE

ABERDEEN, 28th April, 2009. - Minute of Meeting of the POLICY AND STRATEGY (EDUCATION) COMMITTEE. Present:- Councillor Dean, Convener; and Councillors Cassie, Collie, Cooney, Corall, Cormack (as a substitute for Councillor Malone), Crockett, Donnelly, Kiddie, May, Reynolds, John Stewart, Kevin Stewart, Kirsty West, Wisely and Young (as a substitute for Councillor Ironside). External Members:- Mr. M. Vicca, Mr. G. Bruce and Mr. S. Duncan.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

1. The Committee had before it the minute of its previous meeting of 3 March, 2009.

The Committee resolved:-

to approve the minute.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS STATEMENT AND MOTIONS LIST

2. The Committee had before it a statement of Committee Business and a Motions List prepared by the Head of Democratic Services.

The Committee resolved:-

(i) to note that in relation to item 6 (SQA Examination Results, Attendance, Exclusions and Violent Incidents in Aberdeen City Schools) a report on the exclusion policy had been deferred to allow further consultation with trade unions; and

(ii) in other respects to note the statements.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION COMMITTEES – NOTICE OF MOTION BY COUNCILLOR CORMACK

3. The Committee 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.”
Councillor Cormack spoke to her motion and paid tribute to officers for the work which they had undertaken so far in relation to parental involvement, but emphasised the need to engage with parents to a greater extent. Councillor Cormack referred to the forthcoming review of the Committee structure, suggesting that this was an opportune time to ensure clear lines of accountability and communication with partners, whilst providing the Council with a chance to involve and engage with parents even more. The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 provided a framework for parents to express their views and regard should be had to these principles when exploring the motion further. In particular, Councillor Cormack wished that consideration be given by officers to including parental representation on the successor to this Committee, referring to examples of good practice in Edinburgh which had both a parental involvement website and a parental involvement unit.

The Committee resolved:–
(i) that the terms of the motion be approved, subject to adding “guardian and carer” after “parental”; and
(ii) to request that a background report be brought back to the Committee on the options for parental representation on the successor to this Committee within the new Committee structure, and that this (1) include information on the practices adopted by other local authorities in achieving parental involvement and parental representation on education committees; and (2) involve engagement with Aberdeen Parent Council Liaison Group, as well as the National Development Officer with regards to the plans being prepared nationally for parental involvement.

DEBATING AND ABERDEEN CITY SCHOOLS – NOTICE OF MOTION BY COUNCILLOR MCDONALD

4. With reference to article 6 of the minute of its meeting of 2 September, 2008, the Committee had before it a report by the Corporate Director, Lead for Culture and Learning which provided details of the current work being undertaken in Aberdeen City Schools on debating.

The report explained that debating was not a part of the curriculum and was delivered as an extra curricular activity in some schools, but this depended purely on the interest and commitment of individual teachers. A questionnaire had been sent to all schools, and feedback had shown that there was no standard definition or common understanding of what the term “debating” actually meant in schools. Feedback had been returned by 43 primary, 11 secondary and 3 special schools along with the English as an Additional Language (EAL) service. In relation to the
special schools and the EAL service, the responses had shown that there was no debating or any related activity being undertaken. Across primary and secondary schools, there was a better uptake of debating and 10 schools had identified a subject or curriculum area in which debating was taught.

The report went on to explain that Aberdeen had achieved a great deal of success in debating at a local, national and even international level and it was clear that this success was in formal competitive debating and was due to work being done by a small, dedicated and enthusiastic group of teachers at Aberdeen Grammar School who had developed a popular extra curricular club. The report concluded that whilst formal debating was not part of the experiences or outcomes of the Curriculum for Excellence, many of the skills associated with debating were in line with the aims, values and principles of the programme of change. The questionnaire which had been sent to schools and a summary of the responses received were attached as appendices to the report.

Councillor McDonald spoke to his motion and emphasised that schools across the city differed in their success in and approach to debating. Councillor McDonald noted that he was happy to speak to officers and teachers about the English Speaking Union and their experiences.

**The report recommended:**

that the Committee note the content of the report and support schools who wish to promote debating activities along with the development of “A Curriculum for Excellence”.

**The Committee resolved:**

to approve the recommendation.

**POLICY ON POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND ANTI-BULLYING APPROACHES IN SCHOOLS**

5. The Committee had before it a report by the Corporate Director, Lead for Culture and Learning, which provided advice, policy and procedures for schools to encourage positive relationships and to reduce, prevent and deal with bullying.

The report explained that a Working Group had been established to put together an initial draft policy, and the Group had originally consisted of school and centrally based staff. The Group was then expanded and joined by a teacher on secondment, along with senior pupils from Kincorth Academy. Three city-wide conferences had been held, which had been organised by ChildLine Scotland in
partnership with Aberdeen City Council, the Terrence Higgins Trust, Grampian Police, and sponsored by a Canadian-based global energy company.

A copy of the policy was attached to the report, and it covered a wide range of bullying issues, such as “developing positive relationships and preventing bullying” and “what parents should do”. Also attached as appendices to the report were (1) a copy of an advice leaflet which had been produced by pupils for pupils, and (2) a booklet of supporting information which contained a selection of materials, available online, on the Aberdeen Grid for Learning, and which expanded on what was covered by the policy.

The report recommended:
that the Committee approve the policy along with the supporting information and the leaflet.

The Committee received a presentation on the report from pupils from Kincorth Academy who had themselves participated in the Working Group.

The Committee resolved:
(i) to approve the recommendation;
(ii) to thank the pupils for their input to the policy, and for their excellent presentation; and
(iii) to instruct officers to arrange for the advice leaflet to be circulated to parents and parent councils, as well as other local authorities.

INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT ON THE READING BUS PROJECT

6. The Committee had before it a report by the Corporate Director, Lead for Culture and Learning which provided an interim report on the impact of the Reading Bus project and set out the outcomes of the evaluation which had been carried out by the University of Aberdeen.

The report explained that the Reading Bus was a unique pilot project which had been launched on 31st August, 2006, and provided the focal point of a three year pilot project to promote literacy, initially operating in the St Machar area of Aberdeen. The Reading Bus team had been working with cross agency partners and had developed an original, motivating and successful literacy programme across 10 primary and 1 secondary schools. The report went on to explain that the University of Aberdeen had undertaken an evaluation of the project which set out to assess the impact of the work of the Reading Bus project on pupils, teachers and parents and had been undertaken over a significant period of time. The report
explained that the project aims were to:-
• promote reading as a source of life long pleasure;
• raise attainment and achievement of children at risk of early failure;
• encourage family learning in a non-school environment; and
• involve and empower parents in their children’s learning.

The evaluation of the project had highlighted the significant impact of the Reading Bus on pupil, teachers and parents in relation to achieving the aims which had been set out by the project. It was noted that the evaluation provided a strong case for supporting the development of the project and indicated that the Reading Bus had a significant impact on raising attainment and therefore contributed to social inclusion and closing the gap agendas. It was further noted that the outcomes from the research related directly to the Curriculum for Excellence and had the potential to contribute significantly to the development and roll out of the Aberdeen Learning Strategy. Attached as appendices to the report were an article on the project which had been printed in “Education in the North”, along with a copy of the interim evaluation of the Reading Bus project which had been carried out by the University of Aberdeen. The research showed that, for example, in relation to attitudes to reading, science and school, the Reading Bus students had higher scores than non-Reading Bus students and this was also true for scores in vocabulary, maths, non-verbal skills and general skills.

The report recommended:-
that the Committee:-
(a) welcome the achievement and note the progress and impact of the Aberdeen City Reading Bus Project; and
(b) instruct officers to investigate and report back to Committee on 8 September, 2009, with options for developing and sustaining the work of the Reading Bus.

The Committee resolved:-
to approve the recommendations.

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE IMPLEMENTATION

7. The Committee had before it a report by the Corporate Director, Lead for Culture and Learning which provided an update on the current work in Aberdeen City Schools on developing and implementing a Curriculum for Excellence.

The report provided background information on the Curriculum for Excellence initiative and explained that the Scottish Government was in the process of
publishing a series of documents to provide guidance and directions under the title of “building the curriculum”. The report went on to explain that a national consultation on the future of national qualifications had been undertaken during the autumn of 2008. A report arising from this consultation had been published in February 2009 and the summary of the document was attached as an appendix to the report, although final recommendations had not yet been produced.

The report then explained that the Curriculum for Excellence did not have a start or end point but that specific elements of the project did have clear and specific timelines, such as the new qualifications. It was noted that the development work on learning and teaching under a Curriculum for Excellence had been ongoing for several years through various programmes of works, all of which could be seen as contributing elements of Curriculum for Excellence. The report advised that the Scottish Government had published a timetable of publications in January 2009 along with information on developments and key dates and a provisional programme framework to facilitate effective local planning. The timeline broadly indicated that the school session 2009/10 was a planning and development phase and that the new curriculum would be fully adopted from August 2010. A schematic diagram had been designed to show all the dimensions of the programme of change and how they connected with the Curriculum for Excellence. The diagrams, along with additional background information and detail, had been sent to all schools as an information pack in 2008 and were attached as an appendix to the report.

The report went on to explain the current work being undertaken by Aberdeen City Council in developing the Curriculum for Excellence and it was noted that the Council would be seeking the support and active involvement of all its staff and partner organisations in order to ensure that a coherent, managed and sustainable approach to the implementation of a Curriculum for Excellence was undertaken. It was explained that the implementation strategy was being designed to provide leadership, direction and support to all staff; provide curricular coherence by reviewing curriculum design in their schools; identify continuous professional development needs and advise means of meeting them; identify and share good practice by promoting networking across the schools and associated school groups in Aberdeen City; and review current quality improvement procedures to support self evaluation and Curriculum for Excellence developments in schools. Consultation with pupils, parents, Councillors and the wider community was scheduled to be conducted during May and June, as part of the consultation on the wider learning strategy. The report also went on to provide information on the impact of a Curriculum for Excellence on management structures, reviewing the school curriculum, continuous professional development and future national guidance. In relation to the next steps to be taken at a local level, a timetable of activities and priorities in schools and for the authority was currently under
development. It was intended that this work would bring together the local implementation plan and the national provisional programme framework and would allow the flexibility required to accommodate guidance in forthcoming Scottish Government documents.

The report recommended:-
that the Committee:-
(a) note the work undertaken to date in preparation for Curriculum for Excellence; and
(b) instruct officers to produce an implementation plan and timeline for the further development and implementation of Curriculum for Excellence and to report on progress to the Committee.

The Committee resolved:-
to approve the recommendations.

INEA2 PROGRESS REPORT

8. The Committee had before it a report by the Corporate Director, Lead for Culture and Learning, which set out a third progress report against the key objectives and main points for action required to address the areas for development which had been identified by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education (HMIe).

The report explained that since the last progress report had been presented in October, 2008, the Council had continued to actively work on the implementation of the HMIe recommendations for improvement, which had included consultations with unions, management and staff throughout the Culture and Learning Service, together with the Improvement Plan which had been approved at Council in October, 2007. It was noted that the new realigned Culture and Learning Service which had been introduced in September 2008, had attempted to provide accountability, focus and coherence, in particular for those aspects relating to resources management and for service delivery and improvements. It was explained that the important and necessary steps which had been taken had ensured benefits through more dedicated attention to city-wide service agendas for Learning, Sports, Culture and Communities; further coherence and consistency on a city wide basis; the capacity to robustly get to grips with the full range of resource issues which impact on the service (property, facilities, workforce, ICT, and capital budgets) as well as the attention that had been given to revenue budgets; and a clearer focus to channel officers’ efforts on priority outcomes and to address workload issues. The report explained that the service was generally making progress and was seen to be making progress by key stakeholders by undertaking
tasks such as stabilising the budget, re-establishing a sound foundation for services on a city-wide basis, with due respect for professionalism, and the putting in place of a strong foundation for improving outcomes for children and young people in schools, services and communities throughout the city. A full copy of the INEA2 Action Plan was attached as an appendix to the report, which set out the actions, outcomes, current updates and completion dates for each area of action.

The report recommended:-
that the Committee:-
(a) note the progress to date in implementing the INEA2 Action Plan; and
(b) note the detailed report in preparation for a formal follow-through visit by HMIE, anticipated to be late 2009/early 2010.

In response to comments from the Committee relating to the impact of the Council’s management restructure on Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), the Corporate Director, Lead for Culture and Learning advised that regular meetings were scheduled between the social work directorate and Culture and Learning which focused on GIRFEC amongst other issues, and offered to brief any member of the Committee on the programme of work.

The Committee resolved:-
(i) to thank all staff for the progress which had been made, as demonstrated by the absence of red traffic lights in the progress report;
(ii) to request that specific references to the Single Outcome Agreement be included in the report;
(iii) to request that an update on progress with rolling out GIRFEC training be submitted to a future meeting, and that this include training undertaken to date with education and social work staff, and that yet to completed; and
(iv) to refer the report to the Continuous Improvement Committee for information.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ABERDEEN LEARNING STRATEGY

9. With reference to article 7 of the minute of its previous meeting, the Committee had before it a report by the Corporate Director, Lead for Culture and Learning, which provided an update on the development of the Aberdeen Learning Strategy and, in particular, the proposed consultation and engagement process.

The report provided the background to the Aberdeen Learning Strategy and it was emphasised that the engagement and consultation process was an important feature of the development of the strategy. It was proposed that “listening
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meetings” would be at the centre of the consultation process and that they were intended to give stakeholders the opportunity to debate the issues being highlighted by the strategy.

The high level detail of the previously agreed two-phase consultation and engagement process was attached as an appendix to the report. This included a timeline which showed that phase one of the consultation extended until July 2009, with the majority of events being face-to-face sessions, along with a questionnaire on the Council’s website. It was proposed that the consultation process would seek comments and ideas for stakeholders on two main areas, namely the overall draft Aberdeen Learning Strategy and also the schools and community learning estate. It was intended that the consultation and engagement process would help to influence the development of the strategic options for the learning strategy, some of which would be subject to statutory timescales and obligations.

The management of the development of the Aberdeen Learning Strategy was seen as being important, and a key part of the responsibilities of the Council was ensuring that the Committee take key decisions on the developments and receive appropriately timed reports on progress. The development of an opportunity and risk assessment for the work was also seen as an important responsibility and at present the key risks and opportunities included, among other aspects, the opportunity to clarify a corporate vision for learning; the impact upon the Council’s image and reputation; and the opportunity to enhance community learning.

The report recommended:-
that the Committee:-
(a) endorse the consultation and engagement process together with the timelines set out in annex C and D; and
(b) instruct officers to implement the consultation and engagement process.

The Committee resolved:-
to approve the recommendations.

DEMOUNTABLE UNITS

10. The Committee had before it a report by the Corporate Director, Lead for Culture and Learning, which provided information on the use of, current condition of, and the cost of the removal of demountable units at Aberdeen City Schools. Work was ongoing to calculate the costs of any refurbishment of school accommodation where it was proposed to move classes back into the school
building, and to confirm the revised capacity figures which emerged as a result of the ongoing exercise.

Attached as an appendix to the report was a table detailing schools with demountable units. The information included the number of classes and pupil spaces in the units, the date of installation, the current function of the units, their condition, future use and removal costs. Also attached as an appendix to the report was a summary of condition surveys of all the demountable units (a replacement was circulated at the meeting) and details of the estimated costs of the removal of such units in schools.

The report recommended:-
that the Committee note the information, pending a full report with all of the detail.

The Committee resolved:-
(i) to request officers to circulate to Committee members an explanatory note on the removal costs for Oldmachar 1, 2 and 3, and Middleton Park; and
(ii) to note the information.

- KATHARINE DEAN, Convener.