

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells on Thursday, 19 April 2018 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors S. Bell (Chairman), H. Anderson, K. Chapman, J. A. Fullarton, S. Hamilton, R. Tatler and E. Thornton-Nicol.
Also Present:- Councillor C Hamilton
Apologies:- Councillor N Richards and H Scott.
In Attendance:- Service Director Assets and Infrastructure, Service Director Children and Young People, Democratic Services Team Leader, Democratic Services Officer (J Turnbull).

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed those present to the meeting.

2. MINUTE.

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of 19 March 2018.

DECISION

APPROVED the Minutes for signature by the Chairman.

3. COMMUNITY ACCESS TO SCHOOLS

- 3.1 With reference to paragraph 2 of the Minute of 30 November 2017, the Chairman welcomed Mr Martin Joyce – Service Director Assets and Infrastructure, Ms Donna Manson – Service Director Children and Young People and Mr John Gray – Cleaning and Facilities Manager, who were in attendance to give a briefing on Community Access to Schools.
- 3.2 Mr Joyce began by advising the Committee that there was no formal policy in relation to community access to schools, each school's access arrangements being managed on an ad hoc basis. He explained that with regard to the new Peebles High School, out of school hours management had been transferred to Live Borders and, subject to discussion with Trade Unions, it was the intention that Live Borders would also manage Kelso High School and the new Jedburgh School on a similar basis. With regard to the remainder of the school estate, requests for extended opening hours were honoured, if possible, and officers were considering formulating a policy to rationalise the process across the entire school estate. Mr Joyce further advised that the majority of the Council's capital was invested in the educational estate and that the Council could not continue to maintain the existing number of community buildings. He stressed that this might mean changes to opening times and access to services in order to utilise the school estate more efficiently. In response to concerns regarding Live Borders' management of school facilities, Mr Joyce explained that Live Borders' expertise would be used to increase sports, healthy living, and wellbeing initiatives within communities and maximise the use of resources. Their booking system would also be improved with the introduction of a centralised booking system. The Council were also considering introducing a consistent charging policy and would be examining the financial viability of sustaining historical free lets.
- 3.3 The Committee discussed management of community schools in other areas and their aspirations for community schools in the Scottish Borders. Ms Manson advised that, in

terms of the new Jedburgh School, community groups would be involved in decisions regarding the facilities offered at the school. She also confirmed that there would be an automatic locking mechanism in place when community groups accessed the school during core hours to ensure child safety.

- 3.4 It was noted that several schools were already used by community groups, for example St Ronan's Primary School in Innerleithen. Whereas, others schools such as Peebles High School and Clovenfords Primary School were not. The Committee considered that there should be a consistent approach and best practice guidance provided to schools. It was also requested that community schools displayed clear directional signage and appropriate lighting to facilitate community accessibility.
- 3.5 Mr Gray then referred to the janitorial service, explaining that there were three types of janitor roles – static, peripatetic and relief. There were 75 static janitors who were employed in all High Schools and schools with over 175 pupils. The peripatetic janitors, of which there were four, covered 50% of the school estate. They visited each school once a week; this would increase to three visits per week with the appointment of four additional peripatetic janitors. There were also relief janitors who covered absences, sickness and annual leave. Mr Gray went on to explain that janitors' duties included security, portage, maintenance, cleaning, managing lets and winter watch. He also provided details of the Council's Cleaning Academy which provided an accredited course for janitors and cleaners. Ms Manson added that in schools where there was no permanent janitor, there was local arrangements in place, for example, cleaning staff opening schools. These roles would continue to be developed to ensure the best use of school resources.
- 3.6 The Committee agreed that a scoping paper, covering the work planned over the next three years, be brought back for consideration in autumn 2018. The paper to provide clarity in terms of identifying which schools were classified as community schools, accessibility, letting and service arrangements. It was also agreed that a consistent charging policy be investigated, whilst noting some of the challenges around this. Consultation should also be carried out with local communities and it was suggested the Area Partnerships might be a suitable forum. The Chairman thanked officers for their attendance and briefing.

DECISION

AGREED to request a scoping paper on community access to schools be brought back to Scrutiny Committee in the autumn. The paper, covering a three year period, to include details of which schools were categorised as community schools, accessibility, letting, service arrangements and charging policy.

4. HOME SCHOOLING UPDATE

- 4.1 Ms Donna Manson - Service Director Children and Young People and Ms Michelle Strong - Chief Officer Education, were in attendance to give an update on legislative and guidance changes to home schooling within the Scottish Borders. The Chairman, referring to the Private Minute of 16 February 2017, gave the context to the request. Ms Manson began by explaining the current legislation, which had been circulated with the Agenda, remained in force. Home schooling was a priority area for the Council and included in the discussions on the mental and emotional health of young people. National tracking of mental and emotional health was being introduced but Scottish Borders was already taking action in this area and had carried out pupil and staff surveys.
- 4.2 Ms Manson went on to advise that within the Scottish Borders, there were 50 families who home schooled their children (20 primary and 30 secondary) of which eight were being flexi-schooled (seven primary and one secondary). 34% of those children lived out with a town or village, with the number of home educated pupils remaining stable over the last four years. Approximately 30 requests for home schooling were received each year, of those six to eight withdrew their request following engagement with the family. Ms

Manson then referred to the limited action available in terms of legislation. She highlighted that the Council did not have the right or duty to visit the home, see the child, check parents' qualifications, ensure the curriculum was adequate, see samples of work, monitor home education or make an annual enquiry. The same legislation only required parents to respond to informal enquiries by the Council. There was no parental duty to equip premises, cover the school curriculum, work to age specific attainment standards, provide lessons or peer group socialisation.

- 4.3 Ms Strong continued that there were clear challenges and discussed the ways in which the Council's approach was continually improving - reaching out to families whilst respecting their decision to home school. The Council were raising awareness of emotional wellbeing, helping young people gain confidence; developing coping strategies and ensuring schools provided a nurturing, learning environment. Part of this included increased engagement with a range of partners to join up all approaches around the child. Another factor was improving public perception by promoting successes and measuring the impact of actions to ensure schools were the best they could be. In terms of progress, in 2017/2018 the Council had increased flexi-schooling, offered support, when appropriate for accessing qualifications/college, IT, activities and the Education Maintenance Allowance. Ms Strong went on to explain that the majority of home schooling requests were linked to children with anxiety and she highlighted initiatives to raise awareness of the child's emotional and social needs, including, training, investment in a helpline, online support and working with Stable Life. Policies would continue to develop in 2018/2019 with partnership working focused on mental and emotional health improvements, innovation, participation and vulnerable families' early intervention. Ms Manson then referred to continuing risks and referred to the work of the Emergency Planning Officer to raise awareness of radicalisation. Partnership working with health professionals was also ongoing to engage with families regarding the immunisation programme. To conclude the presentation, Ms Strong advised that any requests for Home Schooling, where there was a child protection concern, would be refused.
- 4.4 Discussion followed and Members raised a number of questions. In response, officers advised that the secondary school equivalent of the Leader Valley School, would be the new Jedburgh School, there would also be enhanced level of provision provided in other schools. Clarification around the Section 37 Order was also provided and it was suggested that a range of scripts be available to assist Members with enquiries. With regard to Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) it was explained that this was based on free school meal entitlement and therefore home schooled children were not eligible. However, this would be included as feedback in a reply to a survey on PEF. Regarding a question by the Learning Disability Champion on the number of home schooled children with additional needs, Ms Manson would advise out with the meeting.
- 4.5 It was noted that Ms Manson would meet with the Executive Member for Children and Young People, the Learning Disability Champion and the Children and Young People Champion to discuss future engagement with partner organisations. The Committee agreed that home schooling should be monitored annually providing a summary of the number of requests, how many pupils remained in school, how many were flexi-schooled and the split between primary and secondary schools, and, that in future, this monitoring role be referred to Executive Committee. It was further agreed that a briefing on home schooling should be provided for all Members. The Chairman thanked Ms Manson and Ms Strong for their attendance and detailed presentation.

DECISION

- # (a) **AGREED to RECOMMEND that Executive (Education) Committee review home schooling on an annual basis.**
- (b) **AGREED that all Members receive a briefing on home schooling.**

The meeting concluded at 11.55 am