SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
EDUCATION EXECUTIVE

MINUTE of MEETING of the EDUCATION EXECUTIVE held in Council Headquarters, Newtown St. Boswells, on 18 September 2012 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: - Councillors S. Aitchison (Chairman), S. Bell, C. Bhatia, J. Brown, M. Cook, V. Davidson, G. Edgar, D. Parker, D. Paterson, R. Smith; Mr. G. Donald, Mr. G. Jarvie, Rev D. McCosh, Mr G. Munro, Mr J. Walsh.

Apologies:- Councillors J. Mitchell, D. Moffat, F. Renton,

In Attendance:- Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, Committee and Elections Team Leader, Committee and Elections Officer (F. Henderson).

CHAIRMAN’S REMARKS

1. The Chairman welcomed Rev Duncan McCosh, St Peters Church, Galashiels to his first meeting of the Education Executive.

MINUTE

2. There had been circulated copies of the Minute of 5 June 2012.

DECISION

NOTED and signed by the Chairman.

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE

3. With reference to paragraphs 3 of the Minute of 6 December 2011, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning which provided Members with an update on the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence within Scottish Borders. It was explained that following the ‘Deep Audit’ commissioned by Education Scotland in March 2012 the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning had instructed a fuller Audit to be undertaken in May 2012 to measure progress across schools in implementation of the elements for Curriculum for Excellence and to identify emerging good practice. The audit was based on the ‘Seven Characteristics of Successful Implementation’ identified by the Curriculum for Excellence National Management Board and used by HMIe in initial and follow-through school inspections. The report further detailed the key findings and proposed actions which had been developed into an action plan and appended to the report to support schools in further implementation.

4. Members considered various issues in relation to assessment of attainment, quality assurance, the new exam structure and workshops for teachers to support all elements of the assessment cycle. Concern was expressed about mixed messages being sent out to parents and it was acknowledged that work required to be undertaken to help parents fully understand Curriculum for Excellence. In relation to exams and attainment levels reassurance was sought that there would be dialogue with small businesses to help them understand the qualifications new school leavers had achieved compared with levels in the past. It was explained that there was a move away from teaching to an exam and attainment was no longer measured by exams alone but along with wider educational achievements. Despite the tight timescales Members were advised the implementation timetable was on schedule and measures were being put in place to share good practice between learning communities.
DECISION
(a) NOTED:-

(i) the progress to date;

(ii) that a further report would be presented to the Education Committee in March 2013.

(b) APPROVED the updated action plan set out in Appendix I to the report.

EXCLUSIONS POLICY

5. There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning which advised of the review of the Scottish Borders Council School Exclusions Policy and presented the revised policy for approval. The report explained that the previous School Exclusions Policy had been drawn up prior to major new guidance on exclusions released by the Scottish Government in 2011. In addition, the new structures and working arrangements arising from Transforming Children’s Services had changed the landscape for partner agencies working with children and young people. The revised policy brought Scottish Borders Council’s procedures into line with Scottish Government policy and covered joint working arrangements, etc for partner agencies working together to improve outcomes for children and young people. It was highlighted that the policy allowed for consideration of individual circumstances where certain groups of children and young people were both more at risk of exclusion and more vulnerable/at risk. In this instance the policy allowed schools to consider the individual circumstances of a child or young person and the additional risk factors that child or young person may have before taking the decision to exclude. With regard to paragraph 3.6 in the report, Members were assured that such informal arrangements would no longer be allowed to operate in schools and it was agreed that the wording of paragraph 6.3 of the policy would be tightened up in consultation with Legal Services to ensure that there was no ambiguity regarding the types of exclusion which schools could use. Members also requested the inclusion of a short paragraph with regard to engaging with parents prior to exclusions which may help to reduce the number of exclusions.

DECISION
APPROVED the revised School Exclusion Policy for immediate use, subject to the following amendments:-

(a) paragraph 6.3 to be re-worded; and

(b) inclusion of a further short paragraph in relation to engagement with Parents prior to deciding to exclude.

ROMAN CATHOLIC STRATEGIC REVIEW WORKING GROUP

6. With reference to paragraph 4 of the Minute of 6 September 2011, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning which provided a summary of the work of the Roman Catholic Education Strategic Review Group and made recommendations in line with the Review Group’s terms of reference. The Chairman welcomed Mr Fairburn and Mr Tait to the meeting as Parent Council representatives who had been Members of the Working Group. The Chairman, on behalf of the Working Group thanked Gillian Simmons, Parental Involvement and Complaints Officer and Yvonne McCracken, Head of Schools - West for the excellent support given to them during the life of the Working Group. The Chairman explained the background to the establishment of the Working Group and the Terms of Reference of the Working Group which were contained in Appendix 2 to the report. The Chairman advised that the working group had carried out a detailed investigation of the options and had tried to identify the most acceptable solutions. He went on to explain each of the four recommendations contained in the report under the headings of Recruitment; Quality, Performance and Curriculum; Accommodation and
Demographics and Secondary School Provision. Members discussed the recommendations and highlighted the need for all school children within the Borders to receive equality of resources in the provision of their education. The Chairman acknowledged the excellent progress made in each of the schools as a result of the temporary measures put in place by the Council. The Headteachers in post were thanked for their input which had continued for longer than first intended and for their willingness to improve the learning experience of the pupils within these schools.

DECISION

(a) ACKNOWLEDGED the work carried out by the Roman Catholic Education Strategic Review Group;

(b) AGREED:-

(i) to endorse the work done to attract and retain RC teaching staff to the Scottish Borders and approved ongoing dialogue between the Authority and the Church to address specific difficulties which arise;

(ii) to authorise Scottish Borders Council to carry out a consultation on the following options:

   Option 1: a single Headteacher for the RC schools
   Option 2: maintaining the current model of partner schools;

(iii) that the Headteacher(s) explore ways to build strong links with nursery providers in their area, including exploring the possibility of hosting a nursery should there be a local demand and where this was not already happening;

(iv) to endorse further development of links between Scottish Borders secondary schools and their local RC Parishes, and encourage the parish communities to take an active role in progressing these links.

The meeting concluded at 11.55 a.m.