

West Dunbartonshire Council

Report by the Executive Director of Educational Services

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee: 10 March 2010

Subject: More Choices More Chances Strategy – Activity Agreement Pilot

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To provide members of the Committee with information on the West Dunbartonshire Activity Agreement Pilot, which forms part of the More Choices More Chances Strategy and the development of A Curriculum for Excellence. This report provides background information to accompany a presentation which will be made to the Committee.

2. Background

- 2.1** At the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee of 13 January 2010, the Executive Director of Educational Services presented a report on More Choices More Chances – Destination of Leavers from Scottish Schools: 2008/2009. This was the latest in a sequence of reports providing information to members of the Committee on the development of the More Choices More Chances Strategy in West Dunbartonshire.
- 2.2** The report highlighted that West Dunbartonshire Council had been chosen by the Scottish Government as one of 10 pilot areas to deliver Activity Agreements in Scotland. The other pilot areas include Fife, Highland, Inverclyde, Stirling, Glasgow, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire. Inclusion in the pilot recognised the strong partnership working within West Dunbartonshire and the need to provide a wider range of options for young people post school.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** Within the Curriculum for Excellence framework, all young people are entitled to an offer of learning which meets their needs, and this includes an entitlement to a choice of learning options within the senior phase of learning. This is known as the 16+ Learning Choice.
- 3.2** For many young people the senior phase will involve remaining at school beyond 16, while others will progress into further or higher education, training or employment. For the most vulnerable young people a less formal learning option may be the most appropriate way of continuing to develop skills and to prepare for the ultimate transition into employment.
- 3.3** An Activity Agreement is a first step set of activities tailored to the individual needs and interests of the young person. The Activity Agreement is not an end in itself. The goal is to move the young person towards more formal learning or employment.

- 3.4** Additional funding from the Scottish Government has allowed West Dunbartonshire to appoint an Activity Agreement Co-ordinator and 2 Activity Agreement Advisers.

This team is now in place managed within the More Choices More Chances team, and they have begun to work with partners to develop Activity Agreements for 16 and 17 year olds in the area. The additional funding also allows the Authority to commission, develop and access a range of activities which would not otherwise have been available in a coherent and supported way for this group of young people.

- 3.5** Young people undertaking an Activity Agreement may be entitled to the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). This is a means tested benefit based on family income. If a young person is eligible, payment of the allowance is dependent on attendance at the agreed activities. Through the Activity Agreement arrangements there may also be help with travel costs and other key expenses which might prove a barrier to the young person making progress.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1** Additional posts have been created to develop Activity Agreements, funded directly by the Scottish Government. The posts sit within the existing More Choices More Chances structure and are on a temporary basis for the duration of the pilot.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** West Dunbartonshire has received additional funding, £667,161.60 over 2 years, to support the Activity Agreement Pilot. This funding has to be spent according to conditions of grant laid down by the Scottish Government and is time limited. At this stage there is no indication whether additional ring-fenced funding will continue beyond the conclusion of the pilot. It is likely that the evaluations carried out across the 10 pilot areas will shape future developments and funding.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** The Activity Agreement Pilot is well supported by the MCMC Partnership within West Dunbartonshire and directly through Scottish Government support. The risks associated with this area of work relate to the time limited duration of the funding and uncertainty regarding future developments. The pilot will aim to imbed good practice in existing structures and resources and develop learning and resources which will have benefit to young people beyond the life of the pilot.

7. Equalities Impact

- 7.1** No significant issues were identified in the screening for the potential equality impact of this report. The Activity Agreement Pilot focuses on a group of vulnerable young people who have been identified as at risk of moving into a negative post school destination.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 8.1** The 2 year Activity Agreement Pilot offers an excellent opportunity for West Dunbartonshire to develop a range of options for young people which meet individual needs and increase the number of young people who can progress into positive post school destination. The pilot is well supported by the Council and partner agency and has made a good start in addressing the needs of this vulnerable group of young people.
- 8.2** The Committee is invited to note the contents of this report and the presentation.

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Appendices: None

Background Paper: None

Wards Affected: All wards