

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Educational Services

Council: 28 May 2008

Subject: Class Size Reduction

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide Elected Members with an update on progress made towards acting on the instruction contained in a motion on the reduction in class sizes passed by Council on 27 February 2008.

2. Background

- 2.1 On 27 February 2008, Council passed the following motion:

‘Council notes that parents, pupils and teachers have been seriously misled by the SNP on their promise to reduce class sizes.

Council notes that the promise to reduce class sizes is undeliverable and in the words of government advisers "the scale of the commitment does not allow it to be delivered in the life time of a parliament" and "the commitment will take 8-10 years to achieve."

Council further notes the minutes of a meeting between the government and the Deans of Faculties of Education which states that SNP ministers were told their commitment would require an additional 4,000 student teachers and the doubling of places available on BEd courses neither of which have been actioned.

Council believes that this indicates that the SNP's commitment to class size reduction was nothing more than an empty promise. Council also considers that to state in the concordat that councils must 'as quickly as possible to deliver class sizes of 18 is disingenuous, given that the SNP were explicitly told by the government own advisors that it was not deliverable within this three year spending period.

It is clear that unless West Dunbartonshire Council receives significant investment from the Scottish Government then the SNP Administration will fail to deliver the class size reductions that their SNP ministers promised in their manifesto.

The Council therefore instructs officers to cost the full implementation of the SNP promise to reduce class sizes and calls on the Convener of Education & Lifelong Learning to write to the Scottish Government requesting the full funding required for WDC.'

2.2 At the following meeting of Council, on 26 March 2008, in answer to a question, the Executive Director of Educational Services indicated that the costs referred to in the final paragraph of the motion would be reported to the Council in May, or possibly April.

3. Main Issues

3.1 The costs involved in reducing class sizes fall into two main categories:

- Revenue costs: the costs of employing additional teachers;
- Capital costs: the costs of extending or adapting existing school buildings or of providing temporary accommodation for schools which are operating at or near full capacity.

3.2 Over recent weeks, officers have been completing the staffing exercise for session 2008/09 for primary, secondary and special schools. Part of the exercise in relation to primary schools has been to agree with Head Teachers the class structures for the coming session, including the number of classes at each stage and decisions on composite classes.

3.3 Having completed this exercise, the next stage in the process is to allocate Newly Qualified Teachers (also known as Probationers) to schools. This process is taking place at present, and schools have been asked, where possible, to use their allocation of Probationers to reduce class sizes in P1 – P3. In total, 62 Probationers have been allocated to West Dunbartonshire primary schools for session 2008/09.

3.4 Until the process of allocating Probationer teachers has been completed, it is not possible to provide a full and accurate report on the progress made in West Dunbartonshire's primary schools towards achieving the target maxima of 18 in P1 – P3. Neither is it possible to provide an accurate assessment of the revenue and capital costs required to achieve the target in full.

3.5 It will be possible to provide a reasonably accurate report on these matters to the meeting of Council on 25 June 2008. It should be noted, however, that factors such as the late withdrawal of Probationer teachers from the programme could further affect the figures and that a final picture of the class size situation will not be known until the school census date in September 2008.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 There are none at this stage.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are none at this stage.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 None is required at this stage.

7. Conclusions

7.1 It is not possible at this stage to provide Council with accurate figures on the progress made towards achieving the target of class size maxima of 18 in P1 – P3 or to provide an accurate figure for the cost of full implementation of the policy. However, it will be possible to provide Council with reasonably accurate figures in June, subject to the caveat in paragraph 3.5 above.

8. Recommendations

8.1 Council is asked to note the contents of this report and to note that a further report on this matter will be presented to the Council meeting on 25 June 2008.

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: Minutes of Council Meetings on 27 February 2008 and 26 March 2008

Wards Affected: All wards.