

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Educational Services

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee: 9 February 2011

Subject: Member Engagement

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to seek the approval of the Committee to a proposal to organise a programme of visits to schools and other facilities and services which would allow members to increase their awareness of different aspects of work carried out within Educational Services.

2. Background

- 2.1** Over recent years, partly in response to recommendations made by Audit Scotland on member/officer relationships within West Dunbartonshire Council, efforts have been made to engage elected members at an early stage in the development of Council strategy and policy.
- 2.2** Within Educational Services, every effort is made to ensure that all members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee are kept fully apprised of key developments, both national and local, within education and are afforded the opportunity to participate in the formulation of policy and strategy.
- 2.3** However, there is currently no procedure or structure in place to allow Committee members to witness the work of the department at first hand.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** While members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee receive regular and detailed reports on aspects of the various services provided by Educational Services, and while there are occasional presentations to Committee by officers who specialise in a particular service area, members are not currently afforded the opportunity to witness the work of the department at first hand.
- 3.2** If members had the opportunity to observe the work of the department and to question specialist officers, including teachers, about their work, this could result in a better informed Committee and more evidence-based decision making. It would also allow members to fulfil their scrutiny role more rigorously.
- 3.3** Education and lifelong learning in Scotland continue to be subject to significant and at times rapid change and the image which some members may have, especially of school education, may be based partly on an

outdated model. Paper reports cannot provide as full a picture as could be gained from direct observation.

- 3.4** It is also the case that there have been changes in recent months to the membership of the Committee, with two parent members and two additional elected members joining the Committee. Newer members may be less familiar with current practice within Educational Services than members who have served on the Committee for a lengthy period of time.
- 3.5** Similarly, teacher, parent and church representatives on the Committee may have significant first hand experience of some service areas, but little or no contact with others.
- 3.6** A planned programme of visits to schools, nurseries, libraries, Community Learning and Development Centres, Cultural Services, Sports Development, Outdoor Education and Active Schools, as well as engagement with members of the Quality Improvement Service, Psychological Services, Additional Support for Learning officers, the More Choices More Chances team and other centrally deployed staff, would provide members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee with first hand knowledge of the range of work carried out within the department.
- 3.7** If the Committee approves the recommendations in this report, a programme of visits would be prepared (4 per year) into which members would be asked to opt according to their interests and existing knowledge of the service areas in question. All service areas would eventually be covered by this programme of visits.

4. People Implications

- 4.1** Officers within Educational Services would plan and organise the programme of visits.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** There are no significant financial implications. Any incidental costs associated with a programme of visits would be covered within existing budgets.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** Familiarising Committee members with the work of the department would increase the knowledge base of the Committee and increase the probability that Committee decisions would be taken on the basis of first hand knowledge of the services involved.

7. Equalities Impact

- 7.1** None.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 8.1** There is currently no mechanism in place to allow members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee to observe first hand the work which takes place within Educational Services.
- 8.2** A programme of visits for members to a range of facilities and service areas would increase the knowledge level of members of the Committee and would help to ensure that Committee decisions are taken on the basis of accurate information and first hand knowledge of the services involved.
- 8.3** Members are asked to:
- a) approve the proposal that a programme of visits be organised to a range of facilities and services which are operated by Educational Services;
 - b) instruct officers to organise a programme of 4 such visits to take place in the course of 2011 into which Committee members would be asked to opt; and
 - c) advise officers if there are particular services or facilities which members would like to see included in the first 4 visits.

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Appendix: None

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All