

ANGUS COUNCIL

At a MEETING of the **EDUCATION COMMITTEE** held in The Town and County Hall, Forfar on Wednesday 22 November 1995 at 5.30 pm.

Present: Councillors BRIAN MILNE, WALLIE LEASK, RICHARD SPEIRS, HELEN ANGUS, SHEENA WELSH, JOHN GIBB, GLENNIS MIDDLETON, Mrs FRANCES E DUNCAN, SANDY WEST, GEORGE NORRIE, KATHLEEN RITCHIE, GEORGE ALLAN and Rev Dr R MACKENZIE.

Apology: An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Father M MILTON.

Councillor MILNE, Convener, in the Chair.

1. MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minute of meeting of this Committee of 27 September 1995 was accepted as a correct record and signed by the Convener.

2. SCHOOL TERMS AND HOLIDAYS 1996/97

There was submitted Report No AC145/95 by the Director of Education outlining a draft Scheme of School Terms and Holidays for Session 1996/97, and pointing out that the start date for session 1996/97 had been set by Tayside Regional Council's Education Committee in 1994 and that the number of school days in a session was fixed by statute.

It had been Tayside Regional Council's established practice to determine school terms and holidays for the next session before Christmas of the current session. The annual process of consultation with Head Teachers' Associations and Teachers' Organisations had been initiated by officers of Tayside Regional Council on 1 September 1995 and the responses received indicated support for the proposals in the draft Scheme as outlined in the Appendix to the Report.

The Committee noted the terms of the Report and agreed that it be adopted as the Council's Scheme of School Terms and Holidays for Session 1996/97.

3. 5-14 DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

There was submitted Joint Report No AC146/95 by the Director of Education describing the implementation to date of the 5-14 Development Programme within Angus schools, seeking the agreement of the Education Committee to take forward and adapt where appropriate the development strategies and support mechanisms currently in place, and requesting the Committee to give the 5-14 Programme a high priority when considering the Education Development Plan for Angus Council.

The Committee noted the terms of the Report and agreed:-

- (i) to authorise the Director of Education to continue to implement the programme within the education service in Angus on the basis of existing strategies, on the understanding that these might require to be adapted to take account of changing circumstances; and
- (ii) to instruct the Director of Education to give high priority to the 5-14 Programme when drafting the Education Development Plan for the Committee's consideration.

4. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

There was submitted Report No AC147/95 by the Director of Education, together with Report No 1480/95 by the Tayside Regional Council's Director of Education which had been considered by that Council's Education Committee at its meeting on 14 November 1995. This Report gave a brief account of progress in the implementation and monitoring of the various equal opportunities policies put in place by the Regional Council in the areas of gender, multi cultural and anti-racist education and disability. The Report also gave a detailed account of a survey of applicants for promoted posts.

Tayside Regional Council had made considerable progress in establishing equal opportunities policies, as well as putting procedures in place to ensure that these were implemented and that their implication was monitored. The referral of this Report to Angus Council would be helpful to the Council in taking forward this important work in the future.

The Committee noted the progress made by Tayside Regional Council in implementing an equal opportunities policy in its schools and educational services, and instructed the Director of Education to build on the progress already made by ensuring a high priority was given to monitoring the implementation of equal opportunities in Angus schools and educational services.

5. JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (TEACHERS) AND TEACHER REPRESENTATIVES ON THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

With reference to Article 5 (Angus Council, 16 August 1995) when it had been agreed that two representatives of teaching staff serve as members of the Education Committee, there was submitted Report No AC148/95 by the Director of Education advising that there currently existed, at national level, a Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff in School Education. In recognition of this, existing education authorities, including Tayside Regional Council, had established local consultative committees for teaching staff. It was believed the existence of such a committee would be of benefit both to the Council as a body and to its teaching staff in offering a formal framework within which matters of common interest could be discussed. It would be important, however, for the Council to be clear as to the precise remit which the JCC was given and to that end, a draft constitution was attached to the Report.

The Committee noted the terms of the Report and agreed:-

- (i) to establish a Joint Consultative Committee for Teaching Staff with the constitution enclosed with Report No AC148/95; and
- (ii) upon formation of the Joint Consultative Committee, to seek from the teacher representatives on the JCC, two nominations as teacher representatives to serve as members of the Education Committee.

6. HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS - PROPOSED SEMINAR

The Convener reported that a Seminar in connection with the work of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools would take place on Wednesday 14 February 1996 immediately following the Council meeting.

The position was noted.

7. LOCAL AUTHORITY BURSARIES

There was submitted Report No AC163/95 by the Director of Education advising that, at present, an education authority had the power to pay bursaries to students aged 16 or over to support them in non-advanced courses either in schools or in Further Education Colleges. Tayside Regional Council, in common with other education authorities throughout Scotland, paid bursaries to those students based on recommendations which were annually updated by COSLA and plans were presently well advanced to allow Angus Council to continue this service to students after 1 April 1996.

In 1995/96, over 400 Further Education students from Angus were in receipt of further education bursaries and over 100 school students were in receipt of higher school bursaries. The total expenditure by Tayside Regional Council in 1995/96 on bursaries for students from Angus was over £1.5m including transport costs.

With no prior consultation, however, the Secretary of State had announced, during a regular meeting with COSLA on 10 November, that he intended to transfer responsibility for further education bursaries from local Councils to Further Education Colleges. It was pointed out in the Report that there were many practical difficulties associated with the proposals, not least of which concerned the short term difficulty of ensuring that procedures could be put in place almost immediately which would enable Colleges to continue payments to existing students as from 1 April 1996 in the 1995/96 summer term.

More importantly, there were serious ideological issues at the heart of the proposal which merited at least some public debate. The National Union of Students, for example, had already indicated its anger that the Secretary of State claimed his proposals were in the interests of students. The Secretary of State's proposals had serious implications for students and for the local community as a whole and deserved to be scrutinised publicly before an over-hasty decision was reached.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed:-

- (i) to note with grave concern the completely unexpected announcement by the Secretary of State, on 10 November 1995, that responsibility for further education bursaries be transferred from education authorities to Further Education Colleges with effect from 1 April 1996; and
- (ii) to instruct the Director of Education to write to the Secretary of State as a matter of urgency emphasising the Committee's opposition in principle to his proposal, and intimating serious anxiety about the practical difficulties which would be created by the undue haste with which he planned to implement these proposals.