

ANGUS COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

6 MARCH 2001

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

REPORT NO 298/01

DEVOLVED SCHOOL MANAGEMENT - AMENDMENTS TO COUNCIL SCHEME

ABSTRACT

This report outlines proposed amendments to the Angus Council Scheme of Devolved School Management.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Education Committee notes and approves the proposed amendments to the Council's Scheme of Devolved School Management, as outlined in this report.

2 BACKGROUND

Devolved School Management was introduced by Tayside Regional Council in April 1994 and was adopted by Angus Council at reorganisation. Since then the number of schools involved in the scheme has been increased on a phased basis and, as from the commencement of the financial year 1998/99, all Angus schools have been operating their own devolved budgets.

The Education Committee at its meeting of 4 March 1997 agreed to amend the scheme, and further amendments to the Scheme were approved by the Committee at its meeting of 20 April 1999.

At its meeting on 22 August 2000, the Education Committee approved the recommendations of the Secondary School Best Value Service Review, one of which was to review certain aspects of the DSM Scheme, particularly in respect of central services which schools utilise (Article 3 of the minute of the meeting refers).

3 CURRENT SITUATION

In general the principles which underpin the scheme, together with the aims originally set, have stood the test of time and changing circumstances. However it is important to keep the scheme under review particularly as schools become more confident in managing budgets and to ensure there is a transparency in budget preparation and accountability in the way in which services are provided.

Accordingly a short life working group, including school-based staff, has been considering a number of specific amendments to the scheme. The proposed amendments outlined are as follows:

i) ICT Services

The Education Department ICT Team, which includes officers seconded from the IT Department, provides a wide range of services to schools. At present, some are included within a Service Level Agreement (SLA), there is a direct charge for some services (at an hourly rate) while others are 'free'. It is proposed to standardise the arrangements, by extending the scope of the SLA and clearly outlining the entire range of services for which a charge will be made.

This approach will ensure there is a more equitable distribution of resources, while at the same time ensuring support is available for schools who require it. The proposals are supported by the Director of Information Technology and by consultative groups of Head Teachers. Devolved budgets will be increased by £250,000 in financial year 2001/02.

ii) Central Technician Service

The Central Technician Service comprises a core team of 3 trained staff within the Education Department. That team undertakes Portable Appliance Testing (both for Education and other Departments of the Council) and undertakes minor repairs to electrical equipment. It is proposed to allocate a budget to schools (£60,000) thereby allowing them to purchase services from the Central Technician Team. This arrangement will provide an incentive to ensure obsolete equipment in schools is disposed of rather than tested or repaired.

iii) Property Services

At present all schools have a devolved property maintenance budget. In addition to the current devolved budgets, the working group has discussed the possibility of devolving the cost of professional support provided to schools by Property Services, and a number of options have been considered.

While the possibility has been endorsed in principle by all interested parties, further work is required to ensure revised arrangements are equitable and acceptable both to Property Services and to schools.

It is proposed therefore to maintain current arrangements for 2001/02 but to plan to devolve the budget in 2002/03, subject to the above discussions on charging arrangements being agreed by all parties prior to April 2002

iv) Education Department Financial Services

All schools receive regular financial information, financial advice and support from a small team based at Headquarters. The level of support available to schools is clearly outlined and schools seem to be generally satisfied with the service provided. Schools see limited value in amending current arrangements radically (at present) by charging for this service.

Although it is not proposed to introduce a full range of charges, schools will be given the opportunity to purchase support additional to the basic service available, in order to undertake specific tasks of a financial nature.

v) SQA Fees

At present secondary schools make detailed decisions on the presentation of pupils for SQA examinations, while budgetary control is retained centrally. The introduction of Higher Still and the relaxation of Age and Stage restrictions have given schools more flexibility on which (and how many) exams/national units pupils should undertake. It would seem appropriate therefore to devolve this budget to secondary schools on the clear understandings that no pupil will be restricted from being presented for examinations for financial reasons, and that schools will be obliged to operate within any policy guidelines established by the Council's Education Committee .

Secondary school devolved budgets will increase by £310,000.

The above proposals will increase devolved budgets by a total of £620,000 and the approach is consistent with CIPFA Guidance on Accounting for Best Value.

It is important to emphasise however, that budgets will only be devolved to schools when appropriate, and that an element of the budget needs to be retained centrally to ensure that the strategic and co-ordinating functions of the education authority continue to be provided in accordance with the principles of Best Value.

4 HUMAN RIGHTS

There are no Human Rights implications arising directly from consideration of this report.

5 CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, Directors of Law & Administration, Finance, Information Technology and Property Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

JIM ANDERSON
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing this report.