

**ANGUS COUNCIL
EDUCATION COMMITTEE - 6 MARCH 2001
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT – CENTRAL IT SYSTEMS
REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

ABSTRACT

This report outlines proposals to simplify current information handling arrangements and to purchase new software to improve Management Information Systems within the Education Department.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Education Committee approves:

- i) the purchase of the Phoenix Central System and associated hardware to improve Management Information Systems within the Education Department; and
- ii) a simplified election procedure for School Boards

2. BACKGROUND

At present all Angus secondary schools use Phoenix software for administrative purposes while primary schools use an in-house developed system (There is a facility which allows data on P7 pupils to be transferred to the appropriate secondary school electronically).

The existing central IT system within the Education Department has been operational for approximately 10 years. The core of the system is a 'pupil database' which is used for:

School Board Elections
Free School Meals Entitlement
School Clothing
Placing Requests

The data held on the system is not accessible in schools, which results in data having to be re-entered to the central system, thereby making for duplication of effort, and data quickly becoming out of date. Due to its age the system is not flexible and it is not readily possible to modify it to meet the current requirements of the Angus education service.

3. SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS

At present the organisation of School Board elections within Angus is complex, particularly as there is a requirement for parents to register as electors (parents are not automatically eligible to vote, nor to seek election in School Board elections). This in turn results in significant bureaucracy and costs as letters/reminders/etc. need to be posted to all parents. While these procedures have been streamlined in recent years, there is a limit to the improvements which can be made due to the inflexibility of the current system.

4. PROPOSALS

Phoenix First (who also provides the admin software used by the secondary schools) provide a Central System which could carry out similar functions to the current pupil database. The system enables information held on school systems to be electronically transferred to the Central System at Headquarters and vice versa. Primary school information could be forwarded to Headquarters via disc or electronically rather than the current paper transfer. The Central System is currently being used by a small number of Scottish Local Authorities and officers have visited one such council which is using the system to good effect.

This proposal would significantly improve the management information available to centrally based Education Department staff. A project plan has been prepared identifying when each module will be available, with the expectation that the installation of core systems will commence

and be fully operational by summer 2001 (with the remaining modules to be phased in over the next year).

The proposal would also offer the opportunity to streamline the existing School Board arrangements. While the election process will continue to be undertaken centrally (unlike some Scottish education authorities where schools themselves run the election process) it will be assumed that parents/carers of all pupils attending school will be registered to take part in elections. There will still be the opportunity for all those eligible to vote under the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1998 to do so and for parents/carers to deregister themselves if they so wish.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

To ensure the system operates effectively there is a requirement to replace the server in County Buildings, at a cost of £9,500 (due to increased use being made of the current server there is already a requirement to upgrade the existing server), for which there is provision within the 2000/01 budget.

The cost of the Phoenix software licence, including support and maintenance, is £5,000 per annum, falling to £3,500 after four years.

This cost will be offset by the revenue savings through lower system maintenance costs, initially of £1,000 per annum increasing to £5,500 when the new system is fully implemented. There will also be a reduction in administrative expenses associated with election procedures of approximately £4,500 per annum. Overall therefore, there will be a net reduction in revenue costs.

6. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

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

7. CONSULTATION

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

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DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

NOTE: 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 the above Report.