

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE - 24 MAY 2005

AUTOMATED CALL SYSTEMS IN SCHOOLS

Report by the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To inform Members of the Education Committee of a pilot programme to introduce Automated Call Systems in Schools in 2005-06 and the involvement of a number of schools within East Ayrshire.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** In November 2004 the Scottish Executive held a number of regional forums to discuss with education authorities their practice in relation to exclusion and attendance. Following these meetings, the Executive decided to explore the potential impact of automated call systems in schools, which some schools in Scotland have found to be successful. Such systems also have the facility to contact parents quickly for reasons other than truancy and unauthorised absence.
- 2.2** The Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) have now offered a one-off grant to each education authority to enable automated call systems to be purchased for a number of schools. The grant may only be used to purchase and install systems and to provide initial training for staff. SEED will allow the authority to select the provider of automated call systems to best suit local circumstances and also to be compatible with management information systems and practices.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF PILOT PROGRAMME OF AUTOMATED CALL SYSTEMS

- 3.1** The authority wishes to proceed to install automated call systems initially in the secondary sector. This will allow the selected schools to contact parents on matters related to truancy, unauthorised absence, school closures, school events, emergency contact reasons and for other communication matters.
- 3.2** There are a number of providers of automated call systems for schools. We are currently contacting the providers and discussing the requirements of our systems. A provider will then be selected which best meets the needs of the systems within East Ayrshire.
- 3.3** A minimum of 4 secondary schools will be involved in the pilot programme. Depending on the result of negotiations with providers as outlined in paragraph 3.2 above, it may be possible to involve more secondary schools and, potentially all 9 secondary schools. These details will be negotiated with Head Teachers over the next few weeks. The target date for implementation of the system is that it should be fully operational for session 2005-06.

4. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

4.1 SEED have requested that each authority provide the details of each school in which a system will be installed as part of this pilot programme. This will allow SEED to extract and analyse school-level data via the ScotXed system at the end of the first and second school years following installation. SEED will also request additional information from schools periodically to assess perceptions of the benefits and challenges of the systems and the uses made of them by the schools. The authority will also evaluate the use of such systems, also via the ScotXed system, and via the research unit within the Department.

5. POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Nil

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 SEED will provide funding of £18,000 for implementation for school session 2005-06. This funding will be for a one year period only and is for the purchase, installation and initial training.

6.2 The ongoing costs of the systems, such as voice/text call and maintenance, during 2005-06 will be covered by existing resources. Similarly, if the systems prove to be successful, then the ongoing costs will be funded from within the existing resources from 2006-07 onwards. However, any such commitment to future expenditure will be subject to the results of the evaluation outlined in Section 4.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (i) note the introduction of automated call systems to a number of secondary schools within the authority on a pilot basis in 2005-06;
- (ii) note the additional funding of £18,000 from Scottish Executive for such systems; and
- (iii) otherwise note the contents of this report.

John Mulgrew
Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

JMcC/JBS
5 May 2005

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

Members requiring further information should contact John McCarney, Head of Service: Schools Support (01563) 576126, or Alastair Nairn, Quality Improvement Officer (01563) 555650.

Implementation Officer: John McCarney, Head of Service: Schools Support