

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE – 8 SEPTEMBER 2005

SERVICES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Report by the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek approval for a two-year project to improve the attainment of looked after children.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members will recall that at their meetings in November 2001 the Social Work and Education Committees approved a programme of educational support for looked after children. This was part of a national programme known as “Learning With Care” and was funded directly by the Scottish Executive. “Learning with Care” sought to improve the educational support available to looked after children by enhancing the resources available for study away from school.
- 2.2 Since the launch of “Learning with Care” there has continued to be concerns over the educational attainment of looked after children. Both the Social Work Inspectorate Agency and Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education collect and analyse data on the performance of this group of children in standard grade English and Mathematics. Similar information is collected by the Accounts Commission through the system of key performance indicators for local authorities that is reported nationally.
- 2.3 The Scottish Executive, and the First Minister in particular, has made continued attention to the attainment of looked after children a key policy priority. However, the high levels of disruption experienced by this group of young people in their lives do not provide the essential stability that is required as a basis for sound educational development. The attainment of this group therefore does not match the rest of the pupil population of the same age. This is therefore a matter of continuing concern.

3. THE SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE INITIATIVE

- 3.1 In the Autumn of 2004 local authorities were asked by the Scottish Executive to submit bids for additional funding aimed at raising the attainment of looked after children. East Ayrshire was one of the few authorities that responded at that stage. As a result, through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), a national seminar was held to enable ideas to be exchanged. East Ayrshire gave a presentation at this seminar.

3.2 In June 2005 the Scottish Executive announced that East Ayrshire's proposal for funding support was one of seven submissions which had been accepted for funding support.

4. THE PROJECT

4.1 The Scottish Executive are offering two year funding. The aim of the East Ayrshire project is therefore to develop provision in a way that will be sustainable beyond the existence of external funding. It was also a condition of support that projects should be capable of linking to the work of other local authorities.

4.2 East Ayrshire's project proposal was the result of integrated working between officers in education and social services. It has three main strands:

- Development of stimulating learning materials available through information communications technology (ICT).
- Collaboration with an independent educational provider.
- Support for parents and carers.

More detail on each aspect of the project is given below.

4.3 The use of ICT based learning materials offers a number of significant advantages. Most importantly, it offers a flexible resource that can be disseminated easily, and which can potentially be accessed from remote sites. Using latest developments in technology, the possibility of immediate feedback to the learner is offered. Young people are familiar now with ICT-based learning systems, and they offer a practical alternative to conventional class teaching. It is however recognised that an important part of the project will be the development of effective tutorial support to the learner. Most of all, ICT-based systems can, when properly designed, be extremely stimulating and motivating to the learner.

It is envisaged that in its first stages the project will give priority to support to literacy and numeracy through courses based on Standard Grade or Access Level 3 courses.

4.4 A core part of the proposal was a partnership with an independent service provider. The materials developed in this project will be readily available to other authorities through the network of contacts of the independent provider and there will therefore be a general benefit to Scotland's children. It is believed that this partnership aspect of the project was the feature that made it attractive to the Scottish Executive, and so attracted funding.

- 4.5 For this group of children, one of the most important aspects of learning is the support they receive at home. A package of support that ignores the needs of parents and carers is therefore unlikely to be successful. It is therefore important that materials are developed which will enable adults, whether parents, carers, or residential staff, to support young people. The project includes specific provision for the development of a resource to meet this need.
- 4.6 A steering group composed of senior social work managers, the youth strategy manager, depute principal educational psychologist, quality improvement officers, and partner organisation will be formed to manage the project. The Scottish Executive require reports every six months on project progress.

5. POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Because of the level of funding involved, the Council's tendering process is being used to identify a partner provider.

6. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This project will make a significant contribution to the "Improving Opportunities" theme of the Community Plan.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The project proposal to the Scottish Executive forecast expenditure of £215,000 in year 1 and £145,000 in year 2 (total £360,000). However, a figure of £180,000 in both years (total £360,000) has been allocated. The rephased indicative expenditure will therefore be:

Activity	Year 1	Year 2
Development of learning package	£54,000	£45,000
Carer's support pack	£10,000	£10,000
Hardware	£19,000	£19,000
Software	£20,000	£17,000
Training	£22,500	£22,500
Supported study groups	£34,500	£55,500
Other costs	£20,000	£11,000
TOTAL	£180,000.00	£180,000.00

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 It is recommended that Members:
- (i) approve this project for raising the attainment of looked after children;

- (ii) note this report will also be considered by the Education Committee; and
- (ii) otherwise note the contents of this report

John Mulgrew
Executive Director of Educational and Social Services
02 September 2005
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Members requiring further information should contact:
Graham Short, Head of Service: Quality Improvement, (01563-576089) or
Jackie Donnelly, Executive Head of Social Work (01563-576920).

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Learning with Care, Social Work Committee 08/11/01

Implementation Officers: Graham Short and Jackie Donnelly