

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE - 6 FEBRUARY 2001

GAELIC EDUCATION

Report by Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek approval for an approach to the development of Gaelic Education in East Ayrshire.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Under the terms of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, section 5(2C), the Authority is required to have a plan for the development of Gaelic Education.

3. THE CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 East Ayrshire Council already has a significant commitment to Gaelic Education. Members will recall that a number of reports have been made to Committee on aspects of the development of provision.

- 3.2 There are presently five main strands to the development of Gaelic education within East Ayrshire:

3.2.1 The first is the Gaelic Pre-school project. This is based on the premises of Onthank Primary School and was developed from the playgroup formerly located at St Joseph's Academy. A survey of parental interest in Pre-5 Gaelic Education carried out in 1999 suggests that there is a need for outreach support in the south of the authority. A Community Gaelic Worker will be trained to develop a small-scale initiative in that area. The financial commitment to Pre-5 Gaelic education project in 2001-2002 will be £6800.

3.2.2 The second and main area of provision is the Gaelic Medium Unit established at Onthank Primary School. This was opened by the then Scottish Office Minister for Education, Brian Wilson. It is enthusiastically supported by parents and a dedicated staff. Children are taught in the Gaelic medium, and have, for example, performed in Gaelic at the East Ayrshire Schools' Showcase. Expansion of the Gaelic Medium Classes will require the appointment of a third member of the teaching staff in session 2001-02. This appointment will allow flexible deployment of teachers to support learning in primary classes, nursery development and curriculum development. The present level of classroom assistant support (0.5 FTE in the nursery and primary classes) will continue. The budget for this facility is projected at £110,000 for 2001-2002.

3.2.3 There is an adult education project that is run under the Community Learning Service. This has developed links with Kilmarnock College and is a long-standing and durable aspect of provision. Expenditure on this project will be £4000 in 2001-2002.

3.2.4 The fourth strand is in the commitment to inter-authority arrangements for Gaelic Education. Representatives of the Authority maintain contact with the national Gaelic network and regularly attend meetings. East Ayrshire contributes to the resources that are available nationally, and similarly benefits from the production of materials across Scotland. A member of the Quality Development Team has been a leader in many of these developments at national level. These links will cost £12,000 in 2001-2002.

3.2.5 In terms of educational provision these developments concentrate on the delivery of Gaelic medium teaching. However, there is a wider provision that should also be considered. Throughout the curriculum of all educational establishments, attention is paid to the heritage of Scotland, within which the Gaelic community has played, and continues to play, an inestimable part. Therefore, even outwith the specialist provision listed in the paragraphs above children and young people learn about aspects of the Gaelic culture – through music, literature, historical and geographical studies.

4. FUTURE PROVISION

4.1 There is already comprehensive provision in East Ayrshire for Gaelic Education, however there is, as yet, no formalised provision for secondary education. Currently, nationally, there is a shortage of teachers of secondary school subjects who are qualified to deliver their own discipline in Gaelic. It is unlikely that this situation will alter in the short to medium term since there is a shortfall in Gaelic teachers under training. This situation is even creating problems in traditional Gaelic speaking areas. East Ayrshire would therefore be unable to guarantee to recruit Gaelic medium teachers in particular subjects. Such staff would be entitled to the same career mobility as other teachers and therefore continuity of provision would be jeopardised, even if recruitment were possible.

4.2 The expansion and development of provision will therefore rest on the examination of a number of possible alternatives such as:

- establishing partnerships with other authorities for secondary provision;
- use of video conferencing;
- telephone tutoring;
- centralised and home tutorial support; and
- other distance learning methods.

4.3 It is also possible to combine some of these methodologies. However, the decisions on future provision must involve both the parents and the young people themselves. There is also a necessity to consult other authorities, the Scottish Executive and staff involved in delivery of this provision.

5. POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This report and the actions associated with it will enable the Authority to fulfil its obligations under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act, 2000.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** Gaelic Specific Grant continues to provide 75% of the funding for developments in East Ayrshire. In the financial year 2001-02, this will amount to £99,600. The specific grant assumes that the provision will be assimilated in the Council's general financial arrangements within 5 years from the commencement of the year. It will be necessary to assimilate the costs of one salary in financial year 2002-03.
- 6.2** Provision in Gaelic is extensive. This has been achieved cost-effectively by efficient use of specific grant, supporting a range of projects. East Ayrshire is required to continue its commitment to provide 25% of the funding for Gaelic projects agreed in 1996. In the financial year 2001-02, this will amount to £33,200.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members of the Education Committee:

- (i) approve this report as a basis for the development of Gaelic Education in the Authority;
- (ii) agree that the Director of Educational and Social Services can initiate consultations with parents and other interested parties on the development of secondary educational provision in Gaelic;
- (iii) agree that the Director of Educational and Social Services should initiate discussions with the Director of Finance on the assimilation of Gaelic into the main budget;
- (iv) request that the Director of Educational and Social Services provide a future report to Committee on the results of these discussions; and
- (v) otherwise note the contents of this report.

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services

GRS/DL
21 January 2001

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Application for Gaelic Education, Community Sub-Committee, 14 May 1997
2. Gaelic Specific Grant Bid, Community Sub-Committee, 25 June 1996
3. Gaelic Medium Unit, Community Sub-Committee, 25 March 1997

Members requiring further information should contact Graham Short, Head of Schools, (01563-576089).

Implementation Officer: Graham Short

AGENDA