

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE: 14 JUNE 2000

FEEES FOR INDEPENDENT SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Report by the Director of Social Work

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Committee of action taken following CoSLA's advice on restricting the increases in payments to independent special schools in the 2000/2001 financial year.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In order to meet the needs of some young people with educational and behavioural difficulties the Council utilises placements within residential schools provided by the independent sector. These schools provide education and social care to some of the most damaged young people for whom the Council is responsible.
- 2.2 In general Council staff work in close partnership with these schools on the basis of individual placement agreements and care plans for each young person.
- 2.3 However an area of difficulty in our working relationship with these schools over the years since local government reorganisation has been reaching agreement for arrangements to set fees.
- 2.4 Average weekly fees within these schools approximate at about £1,250 but can rise to £2,749 for a secure placement.
- 2.5 Fees over the past 4 years have risen steadily with, on average, there being a rise of some 33%.
- 2.6 In order to attempt to address this and other issues CoSLA has established an Officer Group to meet and consult with representatives of the Scottish Independent Special Schools Group (SISSG). As yet this group has not been able to reach agreement that schools' fee levels should be influenced by Councils.

3.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 On 3rd April a letter was received from CoSLA advising of the progress of discussions. This letter advised that no agreement had been reached with SISSG on a shared fee setting arrangement and Councils have been notified of increases ranging from 2% to 26% for the 2000/01 session.

- 3.2 CoSLA has advised Councils that, pending progress on a protocol for fee setting, every effort should be made to exert downward pressure on fee increases. Specifically they have advised that Councils should not agree increases for 2000/01 which are above the anticipated rate of increase in salary costs of 2.5%.
- 3.3 CoSLA also proposes to pursue this matter with the Scottish Executive.
- 3.4 Within East Ayrshire arrangements have been put in place to limit fees paid to the independent schools to the 1999/2000 rate plus 2.5% inflation. It is intended to maintain this decision pending the outcome of CoSLA's discussions with SISSG and the Scottish Executive. It is acknowledged that this may lead to difficulties if schools refuse to accept new placements or threaten the continuation of existing placements. However, this position is being adopted by most Councils within Scotland and should continue to be the position of East Ayrshire unless exceptional cases arise where there would be no alternative without adverse consequences for service delivery or an individual child's care needs.

4.0 LEGAL AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 The financial implications of accepting the proposed increases in fees by the residential schools are significant. This is an issue in which Scottish local authorities hold a common view and have agreed to support CoSLA's recommendation.
- 4.2 Legal implications may arise in respect of any shortfall between the rates this Council proposes to pay and the charges these establishments intend to impose. These issues will be faced by all local authorities across Scotland which continue to maintain CoSLA's position.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The Social Work Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

List of Background Papers

Nil

For further information please contact Bernadette Docherty, Senior Depute Director of Social Work, Civic Centre, Kilmarnock. Tel (01563 576917)

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08/06/00

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AGENDA