

**REPORT TO:** EDUCATION COMMITTEE - 24 MAY 2010

**REPORT ON:** PROPOSAL TO AMEND THE SCHEME OF SCHOOL HOLIDAYS  
2011-2012 ONWARDS

**REPORT BY:** DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

**REPORT NO:** 279-2010

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report provides information on the results of the recent survey carried out to determine if there is support for a change in the pattern of school holidays in October and February, and seeks the approval of the Education Committee for a change to the timing of the October holiday.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 The Education Committee is recommended to:
- i. note the content of this report;
  - ii. approve the proposal that the October holiday should take place on the second and third weeks of that month;
  - iii. note the lack of support for any change to holiday arrangements in February;
  - iv. instruct the Director of Education to inform parents/carers and all relevant stakeholders as appropriate; and
  - v. instruct the Director of Education to continue to liaise with neighbouring authorities regarding holiday patterns.

## **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## **4.0 MAIN TEXT**

- 4.1 A proposal to amend the pattern of school holidays from session 2011-2012 was offered for consultation to parents and to all staff, teaching and support, in November 2009. Given the high level of interest, the original closing date of 22nd December 2009 was extended to mid-February 2010.
- 4.2 This consultation generated a high response rate. In total, 1489 individuals (754 parents and 735 staff) took the opportunity to make their views known, both in direct response to the questions asked and in choosing to give written reasons in support of their views.
- 4.3 The proposal was in two parts, relating to the timing of the October holiday and to the possible creation of a week's holiday in February.

#### 4.4 **October**

4.4.1 The proposal was to retain a two-week holiday in October, but to delay its start by one week. Traditionally, the October holiday in Dundee's schools has occupied the first two weeks in the month. This proposal would move the holiday to the second and third weeks. In session 2011-2012 this would mean the holiday beginning on Monday 10th October and ending on Friday 21st October, 2011.

4.4.2 Several reasons were offered as justification for this proposal:

- From an educational standpoint, there is a view that the current October holiday comes too soon after the summer holiday. Pupils have just settled back into school after a lengthy break and the current holiday timing disrupts the flow of learning at the beginning of a new session.
- The current timing of the October holiday was in the past influenced by the timing of the Dundee public holiday on the first Monday of the month. However, there is no longer a public holiday in October which makes it possible to review the current pattern.
- Of our neighbouring Councils, Perth & Kinross and Fife schools will close during the second and third weeks of October in 2011-2012. Coming into line with these authorities would make it easier for parents and staff to co-ordinate family holiday and childcare arrangements. Angus has up to now traditionally taken the first two weeks.

4.4.3 821 (55.1%) respondents approved the proposal as it stands, and 668 (44.9%) rejected it. There is, however, an important difference of opinion between staff and parents. 62.7% of the former supported the proposal and only 37.3% rejected it. The opinion of parents, on the other hand, is more balanced, with 47.7% in favour and 52.3% opposed.

4.4.4 A small number of respondents chose to supplement their answers with written comments. These broke evenly between those supporting the proposal and those rejecting. Typical responses were:

- a good idea - shortens the long second term
- a wise change making both terms equal length
- this holiday is generally too soon after the summer so the later the better
- important that holidays are the same across the former Tayside
- I like them when they are - short term to ease back in
- holidays are dearer in the second week of October
- timeshares have been bought based on the current pattern of holidays
- some Dundee employees still have a holiday in the first week of October

4.4.5 Head Teachers in all sectors and the citywide Pupil Council were also informally consulted, and both groups were in favour of the proposal.

#### 4.5 **February**

4.5.1 The proposal would create a week-long holiday in February, by utilising the existing two-day mid-term holiday in February, adding to it the two separate holiday Mondays in May, and taking one day from the summer holiday. In session 2011-2012 this could mean a holiday in the week beginning 13th February.

- 4.5.2 A one-week break in February would break up what, for many people, is the longest and busiest term. On the other hand the consultation note did acknowledge that this could disrupt preparations for secondary pupils about to sit examinations, although, when consulted, secondary Head Teachers did not accept this as an issue.
- 4.5.3 573 (39.9%) respondents approved the proposal as it stands, but 862 (60.1%) rejected it. Furthermore, it was rejected by a majority of both staff (54.5%) and parents (65.4%).
- 4.5.4 The range of comments made by staff and parents indicates the most important reasons given to justify an opinion:
- this makes more sense to have the week's holiday rather than 2 + 2 days
  - very good idea
  - we have no objection if the schools are off for one week in February
  - why not take 3 days from the summer break to make up 1 week in February
  - what is there to do in February - the summer weather is bad enough without days in February
  - I think parents would find it easier to get childcare for 1 day rather than another full week
  - this would cause childcare problems; also we enjoy the staggered breaks and I think the children benefit from them
  - would not fit in with people's working life and would cause disruption
- 4.5.5 While Head Teachers in all sectors did not reject this proposal out of hand, the citywide Pupil Council was not in favour.
- 4.6 **Conclusion**
- 4.6.1 There is no doubt that the proposal for a longer February break, taken at the expense of days off later in the year, does not find favour with either school staff or parents and carers. It is clearly not universally condemned, but it would be difficult to argue for implementation when three out of five respondents are against it.
- 4.6.2 The arguments for a change of pattern in October are perhaps more evenly balanced. It is accepted that any change will break with many years of local tradition and will disrupt individual arrangements. However, as part of the Education Department's ongoing efforts to improve attainment in the city, the educational benefits of lengthening the first term have to be considered as a priority.
- 5.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**
- 5.1 This report has been screened for any implications in respect of sustainability, strategic environment assessment, anti-poverty, equality impact assessment and risk management. There are no negative issues.

**6.0 CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 Parents and carers, teaching and support staff, trade unions, Head Teachers and a representative group of school pupils have all been consulted. In addition, this report has been subject to consultation with the Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) and Director of Finance.

**7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 None

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Director of Education

17 May 2010

JC/MM