

REPORT TO: EDUCATION COMMITTEE – MONDAY 16 MAY 2005

REPORT ON: SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE CONSULTATION - IMPROVING PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS - DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL RESPONSE

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

REPORT NO: 311-2005

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To seek approval to forward a response on behalf of Dundee City Council to the Scottish Executive's consultation on Improving Parents' Involvement in Schools.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Members of the Education Committee are asked to:

2.2 approve the draft response to the Scottish Executive's consultation on Improving Parents' Involvement in Schools

2.3 adopt the attached response as Dundee City Council's response to this consultation.

2.4 instruct the Director of Education to forward Dundee City Council's response to the Scottish Executive by the closing date of Tuesday 7 June 2005.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 None

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Increasing the involvement of parents in the life of schools allows all the opportunity to make their views known and will make schools more representative of the views of their community.

6.0 BACKGROUND

6.1 The Scottish Executive launched a consultation on the contents of a draft bill on increasing parental involvement in schools. All parents have been invited to forward individual or collective responses to this consultation. To raise awareness the Education Department has distributed leaflets to all parents, hosted a consultation event for the Scottish Executive, and has organised three awareness raising sessions for parents, School Board members and PTA members.

6.2 Dundee City Council is committed to increasing parental involvement in education. The department's Consultation and Communication Strategy outlines that many ways in which we offer parents the opportunity to have their views on their children's education heard through:

- Open Voice events
- Regular meetings between the Convener and Vice Convener of Education, Education Department Senior Management Team and Chairpersons of School Boards and Parent Representative Bodies
- Meetings of Schools Boards, PTAs and other parent representative bodies
- Regular contact between parents and school staff
- Focus groups of parents being interviewed, and their views reported as part of the Extended School Review process
 - The citywide parental survey, carried out every two years
 - The establishment of an Advice and Conciliation Service that can be accessed by all parents.

6.3 In summary the aims of the draft Bill are to:

- strengthen parental involvement in education
- support parents' involvement in their own children's learning and in schools
- introduce a flexible system for parental representation in schools with details decided by parents locally

6.4 Copies of the draft bill, the consultation document and the information booklet for parents are available on the Scottish Executive's Parentzone website. (<http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk/>)

6.5 The period of consultation runs until Tuesday 7 June 2005.

6.6 As a named consultee it is important that the City Council's view on the draft bill should be forwarded to the Scottish Executive.

6.7 It is important to note that at the present time no change has been made. School Boards remain the body that formally represents the views of parents until a draft bill is enacted.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 This report has been subject to consultation with the Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Finance) and the Depute Chief Executive (Support Services).

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 None

ANNE WILSON
Director of Education

Date 28 April 2005

Ref: AW/LW/NJ

Respondee information form

Please complete the details below and attach it with your response. This will help ensure we handle your response appropriately:

Name: Dundee City Council

Address: Education Department, Floor 8, Tayside House, Dundee, DD1 3RJ

Title of consultation: **MAKING THE DIFFERENCE –
INVOLVING PARENTS BETTER IN SCHOOLS**

1. Are you responding as:

an individual?
on behalf of a group or organisation? ✓

2a. INDIVIDUALS:

Do you agree to your response being made public (in SE library and/or on SE website)?

Yes
No

2b. Where *confidentiality is not requested*, we will make your response available to the public on the following basis (please tick one** of the following boxes)**

Yes, make my response, name and address all available
Yes, make my response available, but not my name or address
Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

2c ON BEHALF OF GROUPS OR ORGANISATIONS:

Your name and address as respondees **will be** made available to the public (in the SE library and/or on SE website). Are you content for your response to be made available also?

Yes
No

3. SHARING RESPONSES/FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

We will share your response internally with other SE policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for the Scottish Executive to contact you again in the future in relation to this consultation response?

Yes
No

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE – INVOLVING PARENTS BETTER IN SCHOOLS

CONSULTATION QUESTION TEMPLATE

Question 1: Do you agree with the placing of a new duty on education authorities to promote parental involvement?

Agreed.

As an Education Authority we currently give high priority to the promotion of parental involvement in our schools, and therefore feel that we would have no difficulty carrying out this duty.

Question 2: Do you agree that education authorities should be required to prepare new Strategies for Parental Involvement (SPIs)?

We already outline our commitment to involving parents and the mechanisms through which we involve parents in our departmental Consultation and Communication strategy, and therefore do not feel that this would introduce a burden upon us.

We believe that authorities should be able to combine SPIs in other appropriate documentation, rather than create new bureaucracy.

For instance our Consultation and Communication strategy outlines how we involve and inform all stakeholders in education in the city.

Question 3: Do you agree that incorporating these Strategies in existing Annual Statements of Education Improvement Objectives and School Development Plans (as set out in the 2000 Act) is the right way for education authorities to set out their intentions? Or should this be done in some other way?

It is our belief that this is best done through authority level and school level consultation and communication strategies. This allows appropriate focus and can be audited by local authorities through school review and by HMIE when inspections are carried out.

There is a danger that the focus on involvement may become “lost” if this is incorporated into existing development plans and improvement objectives, as this will be only one component of a larger agenda.

Question 4: Do you agree that the current system of parental representation i.e. School Boards should be replaced by a more flexible system of parent forum, as decided locally by the parents, in a way which best suits them and their school best?

This seems entirely appropriate if change is required.

However, any new system should be designed to build upon the good work already carried out by School Boards and Parent Teacher Associations throughout the country. School Boards in particular have been a very useful vehicle for involving parents in reflecting the views of parents formally. The strength of the system is that it is nationally applied and understood.

For parent forums to be successful it will be important to outline the potential frameworks for operation and the functions. It will be important to recognise that if parent forums are to reflect the local needs of parents this may well change over time - what is appropriate for one set of parents might not be appropriate for the parents who follow. Therefore it will be important to outline the process for a forum's operation to be altered to best reflect the changing circumstances of a school as time goes on.

There should also be a clear system for dealing with disputes – for example where one group of parents favour one system of forum and others favour some other structure.

There should only ever be a single forum that has the right to formally represent parents in a single school.

Question 5: The Bill does not prescribe the means of appointment to the new forums (elections to Boards are mandatory) but provides for parents to decide this locally. Do you agree?

There is no doubt that the system of elections is off-putting for many parents.

This would seem to be entirely appropriate as long as the system for appointment is transparent and well publicised.

There are concerns regarding the appointment of parent members to statutory bodies operated by Local Education Authorities – for instance, Education Appeal Committees. At present School Board members are represented on these bodies as they have legitimacy through election. The impact of these proposals upon these bodies should be clearly addressed within the draft bill and guidance.

Question 6: Do you agree that education authorities should have a new duty to promote the establishment of a parent forum in each school and to support their operation?

It would seem sensible to use “where possible” within this duty. It should be incumbent upon the school and local authority to demonstrate that all possible options have been exhausted where establishment of a forum or recruitment of members proves impossible.

Question 7: Should the Bill provide for 'composite' parent forums where this is the preferred option of parents in each school in a combined school or cluster of schools?

This may be appropriate. However, safeguards should be established to ensure that groups of parents or individuals do not have the opportunity to have their views "double represented" – at school and composite level.

Question 8: Do you agree with the proposal for the involvement of education authorities to get the initial parent forum off the ground? If not, what alternative would you suggest?

This would seem to be entirely appropriate.

Question 9: The draft Bill leaves the forum's 'constitution' to be determined locally, either by the parents or initially under the education authority scheme. Do you agree with this approach? If not, what alternative would you suggest and why?

Again, a framework and guidance would be useful, and any system that reduces bureaucracy is to be welcomed.

Question 10: Do you agree that membership of a parent forum should be confined to parents (the broad definition) of children attending the school or individuals co-opted by the parent forum? Should parents always be in the majority?

One of the key strengths of the present School Board system is that the powers of co-optation allow for important members of the local community (for instance the local minister or the community policeman) to be represented on the Board.

It is important to ensure that the wider local community can access the forum, but parents should be in the majority.

Question 11: Do you have a view as to how the needs of looked-after children should be addressed and catered for in the Bill?

As the local authority is the "parent" of looked after children, this should be addressed and catered for through the present joint working arrangements within Councils.

The present situation and the establishment of integrated children's services is more than adequate to reflect the needs of looked after children.

Question 12: Do you agree that the Bill should not result in parent forum members being subject to automatic disclosure checks but that members, like any other parent, should only be checked when engaging in activities defined under the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003?

Agreed. Parents will be discouraged if the contrary view is taken.

Question 13: On balance, do you agree that 'rights of attendance' for certain non-members of a parent forum should not be a part of the new arrangements? In other words do you agree that non-members of the parent forum should attend only by invitation or do you believe the headteacher should have the right to attend, with the councillor or other individual by invitation?

In order for the forum to be effective, it is our belief that a member of the school's Senior Management Team, preferably the Head Teacher, should be present at all meetings. This will allow the parent forum to ask questions directly of those leading the school, rather than indirectly following a meeting. There is a danger that without representation from the school's Senior Management Team that progress becomes very slow. Senior Management Team representation would ensure that questions can be answered and misconceptions clarified quickly.

This system also indicates the serious way in which the opinions of parents are being taken, and reflects the school's and the authority's commitment to partnership. It would seem strange to have a meeting to promote partnership and involvement with one of the partners absent

Question 14: Do you consider these functions appropriate to parent forums? Would you suggest removing or adding any, or making some obligatory and others optional?

These seem to be appropriate. It should be up to local circumstance to decide on the proportionality of the functions.

Question 15: The Bill has been drafted to allow the parent forum to find out and report the views of parents in the school on any matters which are of interest or concern to them. Do you agree with this open-ended provision or would you suggest defining the areas of interest more restrictively?

If the parent forum is to truly reflect the views of parents then they must be attentive to the views of the whole school community. It should be up to each forum to decide on the proportionality of their response to these views.

However, caution should be exercised where these views might reflect concerns regarding the day-to-day operation of a school or performance of members of staff, where these issues should more appropriately be raised directly with the Head Teacher.

Question 16: Do you agree that the Bill should designate parent forums as 'agents' of the education authority for the purpose of their dealings with third parties, and that the issue of insurance should be looked into further? Or do you take an alternative view?

Agreed

Question 17: Are these the appropriate obligations to place on education authorities in relation to their working with parent forums?

Agreed

Question 18: Do you agree with the provisions requiring education authorities to provide financial support or support in kind to parent forums or would you suggest alternative arrangements?

Agree – but the level of financial support should be defined to ensure accountability for financial decisions.

Question 19: Do you agree with the proposed duty on education authorities to provide advice and information to individual parents on request, on matters relating to the education of their children?

In principle, we would agree with this – and indeed would feel that we already attempt to provide this service for all parents. We would suggest that “reasonable requests for advice and information” should be inserted to this duty.

There are workload issues surrounding this issue. Teacher working time is governed by national agreement, and we could not therefore insist that teachers provide this information in all cases. We would also be concerned if Head Teacher workload was increased significantly as a result of this duty.

Question 20: Do you agree that education authorities should be enabled to replace the current system of appointing headteachers and deputy headteachers with more modern, flexible processes and procedures?

Agree – although this must obviously reflect fair selection and employment law best practice.

Question 21: If you do not agree that the principle of parental involvement should be retained by the involvement of parent forums in the new senior appointments processes, please give your reasons.

Not applicable

Question 22: Do you agree with the proposal to require education authorities to establish complaints procedures in relation to the way they exercise their functions under the Bill?

An Advice and Conciliation Service has already been established in Dundee, is well publicised and is valued by parents and schools.

If you wish to reply electronically, please email your response by **Tuesday 7 June** to parentalinvolvementbill@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Or please return it to the following address:

Parental Involvement Bill

Schools Division

Area 2B

Victoria Quay

Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

Confidentiality

Copies of all responses received will be placed in the Executive library and will be available to the general public. Responses will also be made available to the public on the Scottish Executive website. The views expressed may be quoted or referred to in any future review of responses. **If you do not wish your responses to be made public, please ensure that you indicate clearly that all or part of your response is to be treated as confidential.** Confidentiality will be strictly respected. We will still count confidential responses in any statistical analysis and your views will of course be taken into account in the same way as for non-confidential responses.

Electronic publication and additional copies

This publication and a summary leaflet designed for parents are available via the internet at www.scotland.gov.uk/

Several copies of this consultation paper have sent to each school. Summary leaflets have also been sent to all schools for onward distribution to parents. If you would like additional copies or if you would like this document in another format or language or more copies please contact us on 0131 244 1860. We will try to accommodate your wishes.

The Scottish Executive Consultation Process

Consultation is an essential and important aspect of Scottish Executive working methods. Given the wide-ranging areas of work of the Scottish Executive, there are many varied types of consultation. However, in general Scottish Executive consultation exercises aim to provide opportunities for all those who wish to express their opinions on a proposed area of work to do so in ways which will inform and enhance that work.

While details of particular circumstances described in a response to a consultation exercise may usefully inform the policy process, consultation exercises cannot address individual concerns and comments, which should be directed to the relevant public body. Consultation exercises may involve seeking views in a number of different ways, such as public meetings, focus groups or questionnaire exercises.

Typically, [Scottish Executive consultations](#) involve a written paper inviting answers to specific questions or more general views about the material presented. Written papers are distributed to organisations and individuals with an interest in the area of consultation, and they are also placed on the Scottish Executive web site enabling a wider audience to access the paper and submit their responses¹. Copies of all the responses received to consultation exercises (except those where the individual or organisation requested confidentiality) are placed in the Scottish Executive library at Saughton House, Edinburgh (K Spur, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh, EH11 3XD, telephone 0131 244 4552).

The views and suggestions detailed in consultation responses are analysed and used as part of the decision making process. Depending on the nature of the consultation exercise the responses received may:

- indicate the need for policy development or review
- inform the development of a particular policy
- help decisions to be made between alternative policy proposals
- be used to finalise legislation before it is implemented

If you have any comment about how this consultation exercise has been conducted, please send them to:

Name: Karen Piaskowski
 Address: Schools Division
 2-B
 Victoria Quay
 Edinburgh
 EH6 6QQ

E-mail: karen.piaskowski@scotland.gsi.gov.uk