

REPORT TO: EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 20th JUNE 2005

REPORT ON: RE-LOCATION OF AVROM HOUSE

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

REPORT NO: 417-2005

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 Avrom House is the specialist offsite establishment for pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers. This report sets out proposals that it should be re-designated as a Resourced Location within a mainstream secondary school, viz. Menzieshill High School.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Education Committee is recommended to:

- i. note the contents of this report;
- ii. approve the detailed proposals set out in section 8.0; and
- iii. note that the present Avrom House accommodation is to be declared surplus to educational requirements when re-location occurs and to be remitted to the Director of Economic Development for disposal.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no staff costs accruing from these proposals. The necessary building costs of c.£75,000 will be met from the Accessibility Strategy monies provided by the Scottish Executive.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 These proposals will address barriers to learning for this client group, and in so doing help to raise their levels of attainment and achievement.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This report is part of the process of improving equality of access to educational opportunities for all young persons, regardless of the nature of their needs.

6.0 BACKGROUND

6.1 Avrom House opened as an offsite unit in 1988 in response to an identified need to maintain the educational opportunity for schoolgirl mothers and to provide for the day care of their children. At that time 5 young women and their babies were admitted to the unit. The staffing complement comprised 2 teachers who provided a limited curriculum in literacy and numeracy as well as an intensive Personal, Social & Health Education (PSHE) input, specifically designed to meet the

challenges of premature parenthood. All aspects of practical childcare were undertaken by the young mothers themselves.

- 6.2 As the number of under-16 maintained pregnancies grew nationally, so demand for places at Avrom House increased. By 1995 it had a roll of 23 young women who were either in advanced stages of pregnancy or who were young mothers. The curriculum had increased to 6 subjects with an extended PSHE programme which included significant input from external health and social agencies. The unit incorporated a nursery provision with 2 full-time nursery nurses.
- 6.3 The provision remained constant at this level through to the year 2000 when, again in line with national trends, demand for places in Avrom House declined, by as much as half. Currently the unit operates with 8 young women who fit the original criteria.

7.0 ISSUES

- 7.1 There are arguments which suggest that the needs of this group of young women can now best be met in a Resourced Location based in a mainstream school. The arguments are based on:

- the likelihood that demand will remain at a low level, in which case an independent offsite unit becomes less viable educationally, socially or financially;
- the more accepting public perception of schoolgirl motherhood where the individual concerned is unlikely to suffer the negative discrimination that was inevitable and damaging at the time of Avrom House's inception;
- the inclusive ethos of all our secondary schools where an alternative, needs-led curriculum can accommodate the different and changing needs of the young mother; and
- the opportunity for integration within a mainstream environment guaranteeing access to the full range of subjects.

- 7.2 At the same time it is important that the special strengths of Avrom House which have developed over the years are maintained, notably the sense of security afforded to young women within an educational context, in order to promote the confidence and self-esteem which allow them to continue to prosper educationally and socially whilst still coping with the pressures of their circumstances. Failure to do so might see these young women drop out of schooling and we could quickly revert to the negative and damaging situation that pertained before the establishment of Avrom House.

- 7.3 Discussions have taken place with members of the teaching staff of Avrom House. In addition the Director of Education and her staff have met the young women on two occasions to hear comments and answer questions about the proposed move; and the young women have visited a similar facility in Edinburgh.

7.4 Staffing

- 7.4.1 The current staffing complement at Avrom House comprises 1.0 FTE permanent and 1.5 FTE supply teaching staff, 2 full-time Nursery Nurses and 1 full-time Education Welfare Officer, all managed by a permanent Principal Teacher. Some staff work for part of the week in mainstream schools or other offsite

establishments. Secretarial support is provided by the Home School Support Service.

7.4.2 Where possible it is intended that staff currently employed at Avrom House will move to Menzieshill High School, to give as much support as possible to the young women.

7.4.3 The duties and status of the Principal Teacher will be re-defined in the mainstream context, and the post holder will be accountable to the Head Teacher of the mainstream school.

7.5 **Accommodation**

7.5.1 Avrom House accommodation is unsatisfactory in design, size and layout, and its detached status renders it vulnerable to intrusion from outsiders. Within a mainstream environment the requirement will be for a nursery, a group room/pupil base, an office and toilet facilities. The service will also have to have access to the confidential meeting rooms already in the mainstream school to accommodate as necessary the range of external services (Health, Social Work, Careers, Housing, etc.) which provide support and advice for the young women.

7.6 **Transport**

7.6.1 Currently all young women who attend Avrom House are taxied there and back. This entitlement stems from the need for a safe, accessible and flexible form of transport for pregnant schoolgirls, or for those with a child and all its equipment. The Education Department as a matter of course provides transport for young persons who attend Resourced Locations in mainstream schools, and so this entitlement will continue.

8.0 **PROPOSALS**

8.1 It is proposed that Avrom House should be re-designated as a Resourced Location, for pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers, within Menzieshill High School. The facility will be registered with the Care Commission. Re-location will not take place until the necessary adaptations to Menzieshill have been made (para. 8.4 below).

8.2 Young women entering Avrom House should be enrolled as pupils of Menzieshill High School, with individually-negotiated timetables incorporating as many of their chosen subjects as possible and specific PSHE classes.

8.3 Any surplus capacity in the new nursery facility should be viewed as a community resource open to members of staff from surrounding schools, members of the community, and employees of Dundee City Council.

8.4 The necessary adaptations to the interior and exterior of Menzieshill High School should be made, including:

- re-design and adaptation of 2 existing classrooms to provide nursery accommodation with associated toilet and meeting facilities;
- access to a designated outside safe play area;
- provision of safe pedestrian access from the front gate of the school to the main entrance;
- creation of a reception area within view of the front door;

- adaptation of a small classroom and office to provide a base and office for the Unit; and
- provision of appropriate furniture, furnishings and equipment.

9.0 CONSULTATION

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

10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Nil

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9th June 2005

JC/DD