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From: Alison Cassie [alison.cassie@highland.gov.uk] on behalf of Bruce Robertson [Bruce.Robertson@highland.gov.uk]
Sent: 02 June 2005 14:07
To: Parental Involvement Bill
Subject: 447 Highland Council's response to Consultation on Draft Bill

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has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

Please find attached, the Highland Council's response to the Consultation on Draft Bill - Making the Difference - Improving Parents' Involvement in Schools.

Bruce Robertson
Director of Education, Culture and Sport
Tel. 01463 702801

Parental Involvement Bill Consultation,
Scottish Executive,
Schools Division,
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Victoria Quay,
EDINBURGH,
EH6 6QQ

Please Ask for: **Bruce Robertson**
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Your Ref:
Our Ref: **BR/DP**
Date: **2nd June 2005**

Dear Madam,

**The Highland Council response to Consultation on Draft Bill –
Making the Difference – Improving Parents’ Involvement in Schools**

Enclosed is the response on behalf of the Highland Council to the consultation on the draft Bill. In shaping the responses, the Council has consulted widely, having arranged eleven meetings across our large area of Scotland. In addition, the Members of the Council debated the proposals at the meeting of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee on 19th May. I have enclosed the Committee paper as part of our response.

The Highland Council will follow the passage of this Bill with some interest and would like every opportunity afforded us to help influence the final version of a very important piece of legislation.

Yours sincerely



Bruce Robertson
Director of Education, Culture and Sport

Encl.

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
EDUCATION, CULTURE & SPORT COMMITTEE
19 May 2005

Agenda Item	
Report No	

Making the Difference – Improving Parents’ Involvement in Schools

Area Consultation

Report by Director of Education, Culture & Sport

SUMMARY :

This report seeks to advise Members on the results of the Area consultation process with regard to the Scottish Executive consultation document ‘Making the Difference – Improving Parents’ Involvement in Schools. It also contains, as an Appendix to the report, a draft response on the proposals which requires to be sent to the Scottish Executive by 7 June 2005.

1.

Introduction

- 1.1 The consultation paper, ‘Making the Difference – Improving Parents’ Involvement in Schools’, sets out the Scottish Executive’s vision of how to encourage and support parents both as individuals and as part of the wider school community. The paper contains a draft of a ‘Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill’, which is intended to achieve stronger, more inclusive and effective parental involvement in all aspects of education, and a new partnership between parents and schools.
- 1.2 One of the key messages from the National Debate on Education (2002) was that communication and partnership between schools and parents could and should be improved. The consultation paper, therefore, attempts to review the role of School Boards and the way parents’ views are represented in schools, with a view to improved communication and genuine partnership between parents and schools.

2.

The draft Bill

- 2.1 The draft Bill aims to strengthen parental involvement in education, by supporting parents’ direct involvement in their children’s education, by introducing a more flexible system of parental representation in schools with the details decided by parents locally, and by ensuring that education authorities listen to parents more and

engage with them more proactively.

2.2 The key proposals contained in the draft Bill are to:

- replace School Boards with more flexible and inclusive bodies to represent parents' views – new 'parents forums'
- ensure schools respond to requests from parents for advice and information about their children's education, building on existing reporting arrangements
- ensure education authorities draw up strategies for parental involvement in education and schools
- require education authorities to promote and support the new parent forums
- establish a complaints procedure about the way authorities discharge their responsibilities under the draft Bill
- provide for education authorities to modernise their appointments systems for Head Teachers and Depute Head Teachers, while retaining the principle of parental involvement in such appointments

3.

Consultation process

3.1 As part of the consultation process, a meeting was held in Inverness where Scottish Executive staff outlined their proposals to parents.

Following this, eleven Area parental meetings have taken place across Highland to discuss the consultation paper, with collated responses sent to Head Quarters. A copy of the consultation question template is attached as Appendix A.

3.2 While much of the paper has been met with broad agreement, a number of reservations have been expressed. They are as follows:

- concern that we are changing a tried and tested arrangement which currently works well
- concern that the Bill, in places, is drafted very vaguely
- concern regarding what form the parent forums will take
- concern about lack of structure in relation to appointments to a parent forum
- concern about vagueness of terminology at times eg 'or some other way'
- concern about possibility of no senior school staff required to attend a forum
- concern that the Head Teacher may not be required / have a right to attend a forum
- concern about funding, training etc for forum members
- concern about a forum's constitution being determined locally – prefer national / local authority approach
- concern about issues of confidentiality if the forum can discuss 'any matters which are of interest or concern to them' – staff or pupil confidentiality?
- concern that modernising appointments procedures may actually weaken parental involvement

4

Next steps

4.1 The Highland Council will submit a formal response on the draft Bill to the Scottish

Executive. (This is appended to the report).

- 4.2 The Director of Education, Culture & Sport will report back the outcomes of the consultation process to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee.
- 4.3 The Highland Council will continue the dialogue with parents regarding the new proposals.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 Members are asked to note the Area responses to the consultation, and to comment on the proposed Highland Council response to the draft Bill in line with the Area responses.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Education, Culture & Sport

Date: 6 May 2005

Background Papers Consultation questions – Making the Difference

Author: Moira McCarrell, McCrone Development Officer

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE – INVOLVING PARENTS BETTER IN SCHOOLS

CONSULTATION QUESTION TEMPLATE [FOR PARENTZONE]

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

While in agreement with a duty on education authorities to promote parental involvement, it is felt that such a duty is already in place, and that we need to build on current good practice rather than starting again. There is also concern regarding the extent to which schools will be appropriately resourced to allow such partnership to work effectively. Furthermore, in many places across Highland, School Boards are currently working very well, so there is little need to change.

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

While there is a need for a basic strategy, in light of Highland's diversity and rurality, it is crucial that any strategy can be adapted to suit local needs. Existing School Board arrangements work well in many places, and while the process requires to be modernised, there is little requirement for wholesale change. In any change, however, appropriate local consultation is vital.

In general terms, there is considerable concern regarding the format which parent forums would take. The wording of the Bill is felt to be too vague in places.

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 strongly felt that Strategies must be presented in a user-friendly way, perhaps in an easily understood parental leaflet, in order to helpfully raise awareness of the new arrangements to as wide a parental audience as possible. It would be advantageous to incorporate Strategies into the School Development Plan, but as part of the school aims rather than a separate development project. Similarly, Education Authorities should ensure that Service Plans reflect this as a priority.

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?

School Boards are, in the main, working well. However a degree of modernisation is required, and so modification to the current arrangements would be welcome. While flexibility is also welcome, too much flexibility may lose stability. There is also concern that if flexibility leads to no education staff representation on the parent forum, the forum may lose its direction.

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 consensus that some structure is required to maintain quality and consistency of approach. An election process is desirable, but it needs to be considerably less daunting than the present system in order to attract parents to the process. It is felt that the bureaucratic system surrounding the present elections to School Boards should be avoided as it is often a disincentive to parents being prepared to join a Board.

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?

Education authorities should certainly have this responsibility. However, it is crucial for its success that appropriate resources are provided by the Scottish Executive for the establishment of parents forums.

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?

Such flexibility is highly desirable, particularly in light of the rural dimension of many of Highland's schools. It would be very helpful in the cluster schools arrangements, and also offers the possibility of secondary / primary clustering arrangements.

'Composite' parent forums, however, should not be imposed on any school, but only be the result of full local consultation. Composite arrangements would also require careful management.

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?

It would be preferable for the education authority to provide the broad guidelines within which local flexibility can meet local needs. Training for parents is seen to be vitally important for the success of such forums.

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?

It is preferable for the local authority to provide the basic constitution, but for a degree of local flexibility to be built in. Any such constitution should build on the current good practice of School Boards and PTA arrangements.

the parent forum? Should parents always be in the majority?

Membership of the forum should not necessarily be composed solely of parents. However, parents should be in the majority. The local forum should have flexibility to co-opt members from the local community. It is also strongly felt that school senior staff should be in attendance.

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?

Looked after children should have the same rights as any other child. Thus, 'guardians' should be treated as parents for the purposes of the parents forum. Carers should also be able to attend forums as appropriate.

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?

Much of the work of parent forums / School Boards is not relevant to Disclosure Scotland. However, it is entirely appropriate that checks should be carried out when relevant.

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.*

It is strongly felt that the Head Teacher, or his representative, should attend all parents forums as a matter of course. Councillors should have the right to attend is appropriate, while others may attend by invitation of the forum.

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?*

The functions outlined in the consultation paper are appropriate to parents forums.

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?*

While it is entirely desirable that the forum agenda should be as open-ended as possible, there is concern regarding the potential breaking of confidentiality in some areas. In small rural schools, it would be relatively easy for confidential matters relating to pupils or staff to be identifiable if forums are given total open ended powers. Such open-endedness would therefore require sensitive handling and perhaps further guidance.

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?*

Bearing in mind the flexibility in approach, it would be vital that insurance issues are adequately dealt with prior to any change in the current arrangements. Legal advice will be sought if the Council feels any proposals place it in difficulty.

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

It is felt that the duties listed are somewhat vague and therefore difficult to comment on. Further clarification would be helpful. Discussion with Education Authorities would also be welcomed. An Education Authority such as Highland has large numbers of schools in its area, and it is felt that the costs of supporting forums will be high.

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?

Financial support for parents forums is crucial, but not at the expense of other areas of the authority education budget. In a rural authority, it is vital that the particular issues relating to rurality are addressed. In order to ensure that this response was fully discussed, for example, 11 meetings were held across the Highland Council area. The Council is very concerned that these proposals will incur high costs on travel, training, administration and salary costs of officials.

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?

Such a duty is entirely appropriate providing areas of confidentiality are not jeopardised. It is simply a continuation of current good practice.

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?

The current system requires to be reviewed. Parents should continue to be involved in the appointments process. However, the whole area of training for recruitment and selection of staff must be addressed. Concern has been expressed regarding the current interview system. Any revised system should ensure that appointments are made in a way that is fair, accountable and professional.

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.

N/A

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?

Yes. The local authority should be open and accountable at all times.

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

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