

RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM:

Please complete the details below and return it with your response. This will help ensure we handle your response appropriately. Thank you for your help.

Name: *North Ayrshire Council*

Postal Address: *Cunninghame House
11th St
KA12 8EE*

- 1. Are you responding: (please tick one box)
 - (a) as an individual go to Q2a/b and then Q4
 - (b) **on behalf of** a group/organisation go to Q3 and then Q4

INDIVIDUALS

2a. Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Executive library and/or on the Scottish Executive website)?

- Yes (go to 2b below)
- No, not at all We will treat your response as confidential

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

ON BEHALF OF GROUPS OR ORGANISATIONS:

3. The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Executive library and/or on the Scottish Executive website). Are you also content for your **response** to be made available?

- Yes
- No We will treat your response as confidential

SHARING RESPONSES/FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

4. We will share your response internally with other Scottish Executive 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



(B)

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NORTH AYRSHIRE
COUNCIL

Your Ref: Our Ref: JT/EMcW

If telephoning please call: 01294 324411

3 June 2005

Ms Judy Waterman
Parental Involvement Bill Team Leader
Scottish Executive
Education Department
Schools Division
Victoria Quay
EDINBURGH
EH6 6QQ

Dear Ms Waterman

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT BILL CONSULTATION

I refer to your letter of 1 March 2005.

The attached response has been approved by our Educational Services Committee as the North Ayrshire Council response to the consultation.

Yours sincerely

John Travers

JOHN TRAVERS
Corporate Director (Educational Services)

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SCOTTISH SCHOOLS (PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT) BILL

RESPONSE OF NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

North Ayrshire Council is strongly supportive of the current operation of School Boards in North Ayrshire. Since 1996, all schools in North Ayrshire have had School Boards. While recognising that not all authorities are in the same position, the Council would regret any change in legislation which would damage the successful partnership which currently exists in North Ayrshire.

The Council has put in place a number of measures to support this partnership. A School Board Forum is held termly, with the venue changing to facilitate attendance. One Forum is held annually on Arran. In addition, a Forum is held annually for parents of pupils with Additional Support Needs. Further meetings are held with School Board Chairs as required. A training programme is provided for School Boards and officers regularly provide information for Boards on issues within their remits. All North Ayrshire School Boards are members of the Scottish School Boards Association (SSBA) under a group membership scheme funded by the local authority, which also provides resources necessary for Boards to function efficiently. A Parent Representative is elected to serve on the Educational Services Committee and School Boards are informed of issues considered by the Committee through a School Board Newsletter. Members and officers of the Council regularly attend individual School Board meetings.

The Council would make the following points with regard to specific measures proposed in the Bill:

Promotion of Parental Involvement

North Ayrshire Council has consistently promoted active parental involvement and the new legal duty to do so will make no difference in practice. The requirement to produce a Strategy for Parental Involvement and to include this in planning mechanisms is, again, in line with current practice in North Ayrshire.

Parental Forums

The proposal to make arrangements for parental representation less formal and legalistic is to be welcomed. There is some evidence that the current election system has discouraged a significant number of parents from participating.

However, the Scottish Executive proposals appear to have gone to the other extreme. A Parental Forum could consist of any number of members, could cover a cluster of schools, and could draw up its own constitution. The consultation paper states: "It will be absolutely for the parents in the school to decide these matters."

It is envisaged that the education authority will draw up one or more draft Parental Forum schemes, but parents in each school would decide whether they wanted this or something completely different.

The current requirements to maintain records of meeting and to limit discussion on confidential areas would be removed from the new legislation.

School Boards in North Ayrshire have commented that the proposals amount to "throwing out the baby with the bathwater." They believe that there is a need for a coherent national structure regarding numbers, procedures, declarations of personal interest and areas of confidentiality.

One of the strengths of School Boards has been that they operate within a clear national framework. While acknowledging the benefits of some increased flexibility, it would be more appropriate for the Scottish Executive to draw up one national scheme with some scope for local flexibility within the overall framework.

Links with the Education Authority

The draft Bill proposes that education authorities will have a duty to provide advice and information to Parental Forums and individual parents. Once again, this merely reflects current practice in North Ayrshire.

However, the Bill would remove the right of elected members, Head Teachers and representatives of the authority to attend and speak at Parental Forums.

Schools operate within the democratic framework of local government and it is essential that elected members are able to represent the interests of the whole of the community at Parental Forum meetings. Partnership in education is best achieved through parents working with Head Teachers and local authority officers and they, too, should have the right to attend and speak at Parental Forum meetings.

Appointments of Senior Staff

The proposal to take a less rigid view of parental involvement in the appointment of senior staff is to be welcomed. This would allow the authority to explore different types of involvement which might be more appropriate eg participation in longleat interviews and informal discussions with a larger number of parents.

Ministerial Powers

The Council is concerned that the Bill introduces new Ministerial powers to add to or alter forum functions by order and to specify the requirements of an appointment process.

Complaints Procedures

The requirement on authorities to establish complaints procedures again merely reflects current practice in North Ayrshire.

In conclusion, the Council would reiterate its support for the current successful operation of School Boards in North Ayrshire and its concern that the proposed legislation will put at risk the successful working relationship which has been established in this Council.